

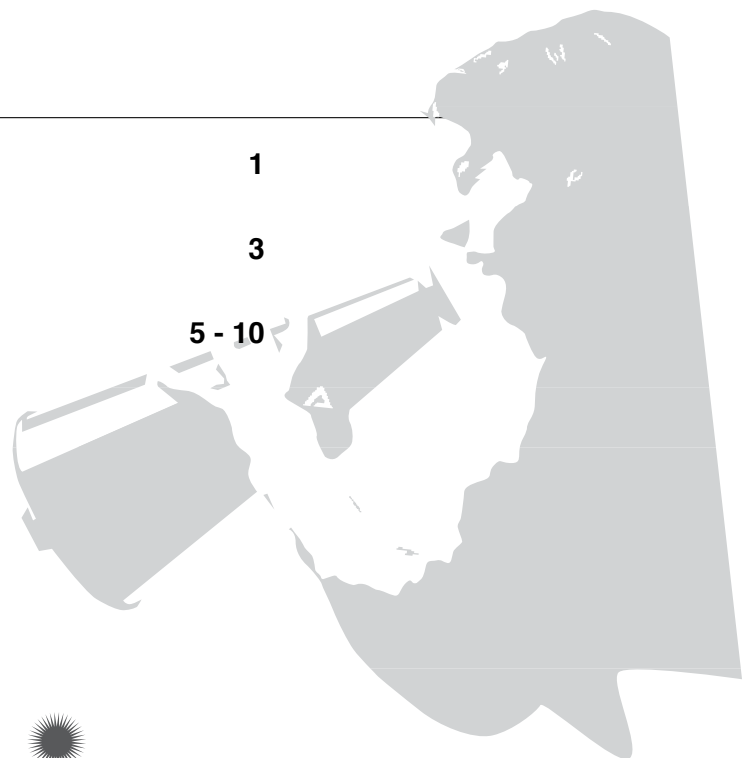
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Are we in a state of crisis with our democracy?

The media and the pundits seem to believe that we are. The latest political period has been characterised by a deep outrage against MPs and a possible loss of trust as well as respect. The expenses scandal has coincided with an EU election and some local elections. They show several clear things:

- Fewer people have voted
- The government party has suffered the most from this
- Smaller parties have consequently shown up with a higher profile

It does seem that the very large fall in voting in the June 2009 elections is a reflection of the current parliamentary mess, but the underlying trend in elections is also clearly one of falling interest and reducing turnout at elections.

In Europe the trend is similar (excepting the Nordic states) with a smaller turnout at each election. Here in the UK the fall is sharp and relentless. Fewer and fewer young people are voting and this in itself is a worrying trend. Across the world's democracies, with the exception of India, polling activity is in decline.

Remember, the turnout figures we see are the percentage of voters eligible to vote, that is those on the electoral roll. We are not sure how many people are not registered on the electoral roll - possibly 25%, with more in acutely disengaged communities, so the figure for simple non-voters is bound to be higher still, or put another way, the voting percentage for the adult population will be even worse than is currently shown.

Why have we got this situation?

Perhaps several elements have come together. Politics has become less interesting. A lot of political discussion now uses business terminology - the citizen as a customer, a consumer and user of services. The ethos of politics is no longer strongly based on ideas or beliefs, but more on the business of running the country. Lots of terminology is specialised now - portfolio holders etc, and people do not engage with this sort of language. The passion has gone from politics, the simple tribal allegiances that move people to vote are no longer there and the terrain of the centre ground in politics is, for many people, simply dull.

Many key services and institutions are part-privatised, 're-branded', and this confuses people as well as putting even more distance between them and the service. Many people no longer know who runs the NHS locally, the FE college, housing services and other bodies that were at one time more immediate, well known and accessible.

Because of privatisation many government functions have left direct government control. The spectacle of the Schools minister apologising for a massive cock-up in examination marking, due to a corporate failing by a sub contractor, makes the government look powerless.

Role of the media

Treatment of political activity has gradually changed over the years. The emphasis is firmly placed on individual MPs, on their personality and looks. This trend has come into British politics from the USA and has resulted in a 'dumbing down' of ideas and analysis. All the TV channels are to some extent to blame, including the BBC whose news coverage has worsened dramatically since a major clash with the government in the run up to the Iraq war.

The media generally cover news items that are linked with American interests and rarely put out items that are centred in European developments. It is widely felt that the media, notably the BBC, is also self-obsessed and spends a lot of coverage on its own minor crises.

This all contributes to a general lack of connection with political issues, a general absence of political discussion and serious analysis amongst the wider electorate.

There is little or no opportunity to learn about politics and political systems. The school experience of citizenship education is mixed, with pressure on the curriculum squeezing out citizenship-type learning for many. Adult education is likewise less focussed on this sort of learning opportunity in favour of skills, and universities, who at one time provided expert courses for the public in current affairs, economics and politics, are focussed elsewhere. The Trades Unions were once a major source of debate and learning about political issues, but they have declined over the past 3 decades, although the work-based learning programmes are recovering and introducing some issue-based content for members to discuss.

So, in summary, we might think that:

Politics is less interesting, perceived as less honest.

Political life is less well covered by the media in terms of serious ideas, fairness and fullness of coverage. There is little coverage anywhere of EU decision-making, nor the different events in the EU member states.

Political knowledge is less easily accessed by people.

Politics and government are something done to us, not by or for us.

This is leading to:

- Widespread disengagement
- Loss of respect and trust
- More people not voting
- A change in politics through the emergence of smaller parties

The Obama election in the United States was an exception:

The recent US election (2009) has been remarkable in that it demonstrated that people can be won back to voting. There are many suggestions why the Obama election was so extraordinary:

- A fresh new candidate, free from business interests and clearly speaking out to the poorer in American society.
- Effective campaigning through the internet (not the press) using social networking and related devices, texting and mailing. This allowed him to get to people on his own terms and not through the filter of commercial media interests.
- Massive campaigns locally to get people to register for a vote and to vote for Obama.
- Appetite for a change of ethos and direction.
- Collapse of economic structure associated with the previous government.
- A realization that the foreign policy is a disaster.

What people think:

The Take Part Pathfinder asked a mix of people in South Yorkshire to air their views on a range of questions.

Ask yourself the same questions:

What do people think about getting involved, about politics, power and politicians ?

Between January and April 2009, work was carried out with 40 individuals and with 5 groups of 8 people, making a total of 80 examples of information gathering. It must be recognised that all the people we talked with are to some extent engaged in the learning process, and not, in the real sense, completely disengaged in local activity.

The purpose of the discussion was to gauge the way a selection of people from the local community are thinking about four different strands that affect the way they function in the community and work as active citizens. It provides a snapshot of local opinion at that time.

The main sets for discussion were:

- 1 Political activism - mainly whether someone votes, why and why not. What was their knowledge of and attitude to political parties, political structures and systems. We also explored attitudes to civic involvement eg being a councillor or JP.

This produced the widest debate and the most amount of comment. Some respondents who were in higher education, or working in the sector for voluntary/community organisations, surprisingly talked about having no interest in politics, not knowing anything about what the different parties stood for, about MPs, MEPs and local councillors. Several participants said they had no clear idea what socialism, communism or fascism were, yet the majority felt they had an understanding of capitalism!

Most of them did vote at the general election because they had been brought up to do it as a duty; but they voted without making an informed choice based on ideas and values. The same group - young professional - was not at all interested in getting involved in local elections or local political activism. On further discussion the main reason for this was lack of knowledge about party politics, about political ideas and concepts. There was, though, a clear feeling that they ought to know more and would get involved in learning more. From all these younger respondents it was clear that the school and college system did little by way of covering political ideas to any significant degree.

There was a clear feeling that the continuous series of changes that takes place in the local scene leaves people behind. Some people felt they no longer knew how to access the council, some felt the re-branding of services into 'arms length companies' and the like were a confusion and barrier for many. Many people were only vaguely aware about who actually ran local colleges - they had heard about quangos such as the LSC, but did not fully understand how they worked, where they stood as individuals in relation to them and how to get their voices heard. Similar feelings of distance and estrangement surrounded the health service with only vague levels of understanding how they were governed locally and even what the agencies were called at the moment.

In the local political context, the creation of cabinet government and 'portfolio holders' seem to have left most people behind.

Several of the respondents were interested in finding out more about the political systems and the opportunities for involvement, especially in health and local policing issues, but the starting points for engagement were not clear.

Generally speaking, the older respondents in the discussions were more engaged with the politics of the day; they tended to vote regularly and took an interest in people and issues. Older members of the survey groups: those who had been through the upheavals of the steel and coal strikes; the council tax campaign and peace campaigns; people who tended to have a trades union involvement as part of their experience; were the most engaged in the current movements and debates, keen voters and interested in the current political agenda.

Several of the participants had been involved in a course about politics and a visit to parliament. Most people found this experience empowering: several said it helped to visit the seat of political power; several found it an intimidating and exclusive place; several found it very old fashioned, out of key with a modern democracy; several thought they understood better how the business of politics worked and how the business of power worked as a result of the visit.

2. All those spoken to in this exercise identified the environmental crisis as the key one of the moment. Most people were aware of the financial crisis, but openly admitted that it was hard to understand what had happened and why. All participants said they would like to learn more about the current crises, both financial and environmental.

3. The next key issue identified by participants was around the migration debate. All the participants had been affected by this debate, but some were more aware of the rights of citizens to move around the EU than others; some were aware of nationalistic and racist lobbies and many were concerned about the local impact of increased social mobility. All wanted to talk more about this. Clearly where refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers were involved in the discussions the range of debate, experience and understanding was significantly different. This group of participants was able to express aspects of their experience to other local people in such a way as to spark a real debate and discussion about attitudes, treatment, expectations (both from the host community towards their own mobility, about those coming into to the area and the expectations of those newly settled in the area). This demonstrated the real need not only to have these discussions but the value of establishing 'safe space' where tensions could be explored and a range of emotions expressed.

People were asked their views about power - where power really lies locally, regionally and nationally, as well as questions about the individual's own feelings of power and influence.

This section raised many views: some very innocent, others more cynical. All the participants felt that there was no real power to be seen locally. The local authority and its council were perceived as being tied in to the routine business of running services. There was little anyone was prepared to raise that had struck them as interesting in local political life and therefore becoming a councillor did not seem an attractive prospect. Doncaster residents were vocal about the elected mayor experiment with which they found themselves involved: all the participants said they were surprised to find themselves having in effect 2 mayors in the town; one elected by the voters and one by the councillors. All said that they would not have bothered to vote for a separate mayor if they knew that they would end up with two! Obviously this position is peculiar to Doncaster but it does indicate yet another example of confusion and poor communication.

Most people felt that the government of the day was the seat of power, but several felt that governments were increasingly less powerful than they used to be. Several were concerned that governments were too close to big business and that the powerful corporate lobby systems and varieties of privatisation had reduced the government's ability to govern effectively. There was a universal expression of disappointment about the current party in government and its decision to go to war with Iraq, despite the clear opposition of the people. This was felt to be the single most disempowering experience that had affected people in recent years. Several people commented that the government's inability even to get kids' exams marked properly was an indicator of its powerlessness.

There was no understanding about the role of regional bodies and their powers. This is significant and once more reflects on the confusing system of having regional structures without representation. Most felt they would like to know more about the regional set-up so that they could understand it better.

The EU and its workings was even more of a marginal issue for the majority of the participants. They could all quote the silly aspects and media myths about the EU but knowledge of the powers and influence of the EU was limited. Most indigenous participants did not know they were EU citizens: the understanding was different, for immigrants, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who had been through detailed processes which brought this knowledge home to them on a personal basis. Again the sample was interested enough to learn about the EU and thought workshops would be a good idea. The prospect of visiting an EU institution was attractive for most of the people involved in the exercise.

However, most people felt they had little or no real power to change or influence events.

What about politicians?

We asked for opinions on politicians, about their respect or otherwise for them, their effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses.

Under the current media storm about MPs and their expenses fiddles it is unsurprising that participants felt generally that MPs were behaving badly, were 'on the take' and setting a poor example. Participants who have come to the UK from other countries felt slightly differently towards the MPs. They felt that they were generally honest, and, by comparison with politicians they had witnessed in other countries, not seriously corrupt.

They felt that access to politicians was not fairly distributed across the sectors and society. Powerful interest groups had a closeness to government and civil servants that was not available to other sectors leading to a view that the system of lobbying was a process that weakened democracy and generated cynicism in the wider public.

Overall they felt politicians were distant and the current range of political concerns was unexciting for the majority. This is perhaps a reflection on centre-type politics where ideas and concepts seem to have been replaced by management expediency.

How do you get your information?

We asked people how their opinions were formed.

Alongside this we asked people about where they get the information upon which their opinions are founded: discussions, newspaper, TV, the Internet.

There is, again, a wide range of responses to this set of questions. Most people did not take a newspaper, although many browsed them at supermarkets and were aware of the powerful nature of the large red headlines, which often sufficed as news gathering for several of them. There was a feeling that the better newspapers were far too expensive for most people to buy on a daily basis. Local weekly papers were well read, especially for local news, jobs, information: many people, though, felt them to be dubious in the way they handled issues about poverty, politics, unemployment and migration.

Many respondents used the internet for gathering news and forming opinions; a few people, often newcomers, looked at the Africa channel or Al-Jazeera, which they found stimulating. Several looked at the Guardian on line, which they rated highly. Many were active in social networking on the internet, with Facebook being mentioned along with other specialist networks.

TV was a major source of information and here people's views were very interesting. Several people felt that the BBC was only an average source of information. They felt that you got '90 second' bites and little else - they also felt the European and world coverage was very thin, with a large degree of time given to American material. They felt it had become more 'popular' and less intellectual. ITV was similarly regarded, but perhaps even more disappointingly trivial in its coverage and selection of stories. All felt frustrated that there was news for a time, big news, then nothing more and no follow up of once very large stories, leaving people half informed.

Surprisingly CNN was quite well liked as it doesn't pretend to be a quality news outfit and does, however briefly, cover a world canvass, usually linked to American global commercial interests.

Channel 4 News was the best regarded of the news channels by most of the participants. They felt it had integrity and was prepared to cover items in depth, with a genuinely critical tone, and pursue an issue for longer. It seems that the Channel 4 team are just right for the job, not too posh, interestingly diverse, not patronising and very credible as good professionals.

There was a genuine interest in the media and its power. Most people felt that news was manipulated for many different reasons and that particular interests were reflected. The coverage of migration, for example, was felt to be bad: all the media, including the BBC channels, were unable to differentiate between migration and immigration, thus leading to widespread popular confusion about rights and legal entitlements. Some of the groups felt that the media were clearly hostile to all forms of migration and helped contribute to the growth of xenophobia that is current in society. They were felt to be at fault in calling in commentators from dubious lobby and opinion forming groups such as Migration Watch and failed to give a balanced view in overall discussion.

The news giving process was felt to be excluding by several participants: the language used, many ideas and concepts went unexplained and therefore many were left behind. Large assumptions about people's wider knowledge were made. The example of the treatment of the Israeli/Palestine conflict was cited by several people who felt that the history of the conflict was never really alluded to so that the illegality in international terms of much Israeli action was not brought into focus. There was no mention of Zionism as a key religious force in Israeli/Middle eastern politics, but plenty of references to Moslem fundamentalism. The war in Sri Lanka was a similar complaint: no-one really felt confident to say what the key issues were, why the Tamil Tigers were at war with the government and what differences there were between the factions.

Although a vast amount of coverage had been given to the financial crash many felt that it really did not affect them as much as others: most respondents were clearly not well off, if in work then it was largely part-time and poorly paid, debt is something they live with on a daily basis and the notion of loss of assets and capital savings applies more to other sectors of society than to them. There was a feeling that the major news organisations had fallen into promoting the cult of celebrity and should be able to do something more worthwhile and responsible than this. Finally the TV was felt to be self-obsessed at times, with excessive attention being given (eg by the BBC) to itself and the scrapes it gets into over some stories and coverage.

In terms of follow-up activities, the idea of media watch work, of serious analysis of news coverage and its angles, was liked by most people who thought it would be an interesting theme for workshops.

Are you an active citizen?

We asked about being active, volunteering - experience of this, trigger points, training needs, support needs and reflection on what benefits it gives.

Getting involved, volunteering, (although this term is felt to be uncomfortable by most of the (working class) respondents) is something that almost all (95%) of the sample did; they were active in community groups, in residents' associations, in charity fund raising, in interest groups and in particular local organisations. All the sample were involved mainly in the voluntary and community sector, with very few supporting local authorities or other statutory bodies and none had any contact with the private sector. The majority of the sample saw getting involved as a way of making things better, or trying to put things right. Younger members of the sample, some in higher education, all felt strongly that volunteering was a clear way of building up their CVs, of gaining useful experience and practical knowledge, of new useful skills and contacts which would give them a positive basis for networking locally. Refugees and new communities generally felt that joining in with the work of local organisations was particularly helpful to them in making friends, doing something useful and helpful, learning English language skills and being closer to possible employment opportunities.

Most of the sample generally began volunteering as a result of a clear 'trigger'. This could be, for example, when their children began school, thus opening the way for supporting the school and possibly becoming school governors. A common trigger for many of the sample was a consequence of a family member getting caught up in drugs or substance abuse; some of these incidents were tragically serious for the family, others less so, but still the urge to combat the spread of serious drug use in the community was clearly a major factor amongst the sample. (This does give some idea of the scale and seriousness of the drug problem in our local communities). One member who had lost his brother to drugs was clear about his approach to volunteering: he was not looking for things to do - he felt he had to do something to fight the spread of the problem.

Most felt that it was not so easy to get involved: the knowledge of opportunities in voluntary organisations was not widespread. No-one in the sample had come into volunteering through use of a volunteer bureau, indeed this service was not known to many in the sample. Many felt that more people would get involved if local opportunities were better known.

There was a view expressed about a cultural change in regard to volunteering; for many working class people the idea of unpaid work had been a problem, but with the changing nature of local work in the communities more and more people were happy to give the time and effort to local activities.

Most felt that their experience of volunteering was a positive one: most received orientation, awareness raising and training from the organisation; most felt genuinely well deployed and valued; most were well supported in the work they were able to do in the organisation.

Most of the sample were more than willing to act as ambassadors for local volunteering and to help spread the work to potential new activists. All of the sample expressed admiration of the professional approach and commitment they witnessed from the staff of the organisations. Many spoke about the values and standards they had come into contact with; concepts of confidentiality, trust and a keen sense of social justice were all evident in people's experience of this area of work. Many contrasted this ethos with their working experience in the private sector where the profit at all costs was the main motive.

Many people were clear about the personal development they had made through volunteering: this was especially true of getting back into learning and finding the drive and motivation to re-launch their education. For a small number of the sample, some refugees in particular, the voluntary experience has led to work and to advanced education. Getting involved in local organisations has led to some insight into how things work locally, however most did express the view that the context was complex and confusing and help was needed to make sense of how things fitted together and worked interdependently.

Most people did express the view that volunteering had given them a better understanding of civil life and a sense of being part of a greater whole: they felt they were less detached and more integrated.

From these discussions we can draw out several sets of activities that it might be worth trying to make available for people in communities:

Getting knowledge, know-how and information

There is an appetite for knowledge and debate. The learning how - to do things in the community, to be a councillor or representative, how things work locally and nationally, might be one straightforward way of satisfying this need.

Courses or workshops on how your community, town, council, school, health trust, police service, regional government, works would help people.

How politics works, political literacy, institutions and ideas were all seen as useful. In particular there was interest in *Why vote* workshops, which allowed people to explore what is e-democracy, e-petitions, networking and the potential for texting and local opinion testing.

People wanted to learn the skills needed to campaign and lobby, to get themselves heard, to learn how to use the internet and how the media works, through TV news analysis workshops and discussion. They also felt visits and face-to-face sessions with key people would be useful.

'Safe space' discussions on current 'hot' issues were felt to be a good idea.

Some wanted help in getting involved and volunteering through information and support.

Those involved in activities felt developing a popular and interactive web presence, giving information and promoting digital skills, would be helpful.

Other suggestions included:

Mounting events and meetings on a particular theme - diversity, equality, democracy week etc.

Collecting people's stories and examples of role models for popular publication.

Keeping up to date

Using the internet to keep up to date with political events

The BBC has just set up a new on-line service called Democracy Live which lets us watch proceedings at the various political assemblies in the UK and in the EU. You can find this on the home page of the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk>, look to the middle left area and you'll see a list of items on offer including Democracy Live.

You can also easily keep in touch with EU processes by checking their own website on http://www.europa.eu/index_en.htm

Your own local authority website will contain useful information about elections and democracy, as well as the proceedings of the local council. They usually follow the same form e.g **www. name of local authority. gov uk**

The media is a problem. Most of the newspapers have particular agendas and viewpoints that skew the political reporting. In all honesty the safest newspaper to read, and also lively enough to escape being dull, is the Guardian. It is costly to buy at £1 per day, but you can enjoy it free (for the time being) on line. Go to [www. guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk). If you want a range of opinion about the same issues, then look at something like the Daily Mail. Go to: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk>

Finally, if you want a wider perspective in terms of news you can look at the English version of Al Jazeera, a successful, impartial and well respected news company that looks at the world from a Middle Eastern, African and developing world point of view. Go to <http://www.english.aljazeera.net> Don't worry - this will not result in your receiving a visit from the security forces!

WHY VOTE?

WEA SCHEME OF WORK					Why Vote?
<p>Course title: Why Vote?</p> <p>Tutor:</p> <p>Course Learning Outcomes: By the end of the course the learners will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand more about the crisis in democracy - attitudes, reasons, local statistics and implications. 					
Session Number/Date	Learning Outcomes	Learning Methods	Resources Methods	Assessment Reviews	Progress
am	<p>Improve discussion and reporting skills.</p> <p>Analyse and understand local electoral trends.</p> <p>Explore and be aware of what is meant by the crisis in democracy.</p> <p>Develop research skills.</p> <p>Develop IT/internet skills.</p>	<p>Group work, working in pairs, discussion, practical research of internet resources.</p>	<p>Newspaper cuttings and archival material</p> <p>Books</p> <p>Web sites</p>	<p>Question and answer</p> <p>Flip chart notes</p> <p>Self-assessment</p> <p>Some recording</p>	
pm	<p>It is also expected that participants will gain a greater sense of empowerment in relation to local structures and engagement.</p>	<p>Group work, working in pairs, discussion, practical research of internet resources.</p>	<p>Newspaper cuttings and archival material</p> <p>Books</p> <p>Web sites</p>	<p>Question and answer</p> <p>Flip chart notes</p> <p>Self-assessment</p> <p>Some recording</p>	



WHY VOTE?

WEA SESSION PLAN		Why Vote Workshop		
Course Title: Why Vote Workshop				
Session Aims	Understand more about the crisis in democracy - attitudes, reasons, local statistics and implications This workshop can be run as a single day or as two linked sessions using the morning programme as session one etc....			
Session Learning Outcomes	By the end of the session students will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved their discussion and reporting skills • The ability to analyse and understand local electoral trends • Explored and be aware of what is meant by the crisis in democracy • Developed research skills • Developed IT/internet skills It is also expected that participants will gain a greater sense of empowerment in relation to local structures and engagement.			
Resources	Newspaper cuttings and archival material, Books, Web sites			
Time	Activity Objectives	Tutor activity	Learner activity	Methods for checking learning
10.00 - 11.15	Sharing some basic information on the current crisis.	See detailed tutor notes for the session Introductions - Setting the scene – the current context for our democracy (presentation and discussion) (45 minutes) (use the first section (pages 1-3) of the pamphlet).	Listening, noting, questions discussion.	Notes, views captured on paper and recorder.
11.15 - 12:30	Exploring what we all think individually about the issues.	What we think – group work exercise. People work in pairs to interview and record each other's views about the key questions (45 minutes) then report back to the whole group on what they have found out (30 minutes) (pages 4-10 of the pamphlet contains a fuller result of the exercise from S. Yorkshire). Feedback session Lunch break	Working in pairs and reporting back.	
12.30				

WHY VOTE?

WEA SESSION PLAN

Why Vote Workshop

Course Title: Why Vote Workshop

Time	Activity Objectives	Tutor activity	Learner activity	Methods for checking learning
1.30 - 3.00	Researching the local scene.	Facts and statistics - Using the internet to set out the political profile of the locality and the voting trends in local elections, to look at the general elections and EU elections to see trends. Thinking about the general election - getting the most from the process. (90 minutes) (use exercise 1 Local democracy).	Working in groups with data and reports.	
3.00 - 4.00	Plenary session.	Our views - Plenary discussion and recording of the event for publishing on the TP Pathfinder web pages (30 minutes). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What we have learned • What we want to do next • General Election	Reporting back, discussion and debate.	

Notes and comments:

TUTOR NOTES SESSION PLAN 1: Why Vote

10.00 – Course Introduction (10 mins)

- Welcome. Ask people to introduce themselves, say where they are from and what their interest is in this subject. (keep this very brief)
- Take participants through any housekeeping issues – coffee times, fire escape, toilets, lunch if applicable, etc.
- Ask if there are any questions, if anyone has to leave early, etc.
- Outline the session aims and outcomes (whether it is session 1, or sessions 1&2.) Describe the day to them.

It's important to establish a few rules here, at the start: people can say what they feel, but people need to respond with care, even if they disagree. It's hoped that through discussion and looking at factual data everyone will modify their ideas in some way.

Idea!

Ideally participants will raise questions/issues as you go along but sometimes it is preferable to put together a questions/concept board. Participants can then write any concerns/issues etc they have and want to discuss on post-it notes. Tutors can then find 10 minutes at the end of a session to address these 'notes'.

10.30 - 11.15 – Setting the scene - the power point works here just to fix a few key ideas and start discussion. The first section of the pamphlet (pages 1-3) can be used here with the groups. Ask the learners what they think so far. Does any of this accord with their experience and opinions? Download the power point from www.takepartyh.org to the resources section to find it.

11.15 - 12-30 - ACTIVITY

Working in pairs and using the main section of the pamphlet, we want learners to think about the points raised by other people in South Yorkshire and tell each other what they think about the issues. You could make a list of the questions and leave spaces so that people can record some views.

- Keep moving between the tables and join in the discussion where appropriate, especially if some pairs are flagging a little.
- Leave twenty minutes for reporting back and follow-up discussion.
- Lunch break – opportunity to network and discuss.

TUTOR NOTES SESSION PLAN 2: Why Vote

1.30 - 3.00 - Researching the local scene

Practical research session, using the internet.

Make a table of democratic trends, election results over a short time span.

Information is drawn from two contrasting areas: the South West and South Yorkshire. One is relatively better off with a good tourism and retirement base; the other is poorer, being a post - industrial, largely urban area.

Most information is available from the local authority web site, for example www.devon.gov.uk will offer you a search box, but try this link to save time. http://www.devon.gov.uk/gsasearchresults.htm?q=election+results&search=Search...&requiredfields=devon&concept=Care&advanced=&as_epq=&as_eq=&as_oq1=&as_oq2=&as_oq3=&as_filetype=devon where the latest report on the local elections is available.

Similarly go to the websites for the South Yorkshire councils to find electoral information:

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/100004/council_and_democracy/519/previous_election_results/4 will get you to the results you need.

For Barnsley try: http://www.barnsley.gov.uk/bguk/Council_Democracy/How_the_Council_Works/Electoral%20Services/Elections/Election_Results

For Doncaster try: http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/Living_in_Doncaster/The_Mayor_and_Council/voting_elections_democracy/Elections/Parliamentary_Mayoral_and_Local_Elections.asp

If you want to look at a wide range of parliamentary results over time then these sites are excellent.

Exercise

Working in pairs, complete this exercise using the internet to find the information.

Remember, though, not everyone will be skilled at using the Internet in this way. Make yourself available to help. If anyone in the workshop is super quick let them help someone less experienced.

Electoral trends in the SW

Turnout percentages in elections

	2001	2004	2005	2009
Devon CC	*		*	*
SW European		*		*
Exeter Parliament	*		*	

Using the Internet, fill in the columns marked with a *

(Completed exercise - the answers)

Electoral trends in the SW

Turnout percentages in elections

	2001	2004	2005	2009
Devon CC	69.1		67.4	43.9
SW European		37.7		38
Exeter Parliament	64.21		66.3	

Electoral trends in South Yorkshire and YH

Euro activities

	2001	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009
SY Local:						
BMBC				*	*	
RMBC			*	*	*	
DMBC				*	*	
DMBC Mayoral				*		*
YH European						
		*				*
Parliamentary						
Barnsley	*		*			
Doncaster	*		*			
Rotherham	*		*			

(Election activities completed)

	2001	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009
SY Local:						
BMBC				33.22	34.78	
RMBC			32.37	33.04	34.52	
DMBC				34.20	34.70	
DMBC Mayoral				54.56		34.6
YH European		42.3				34
Parliamentary						
Barnsley	45.48		47.09			
Doncaster	51.61		52.26			
Rotherham	50.67		55.14			

Reading list and Internet sites

Books

Power and politics in modern Britain, Beetham and others, Democratic audit (2008)

Why we hate politics, Colin Hay, Polity (2007)

Check the Power Inquiry, an interesting exercise, which has collected masses of information about democracy in the UK. Go to <http://www.power2010.org.uk>

Parliament itself has a very useful web site. Go to: <http://www.parliament.uk>

If you want to look at a wide range of parliamentary results over time then this site is excellent, click on: <http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/area/uk/edates.htm>

This document also contains an excellent list of links to reports and articles.

3.00-4.00 Final session, feedback and discussion

Plenary and feedback from the participants on:

- What we have learned
- What more we need to know
- What we want to do next

Go back to the notes from session one and see if everything has been covered.

If you are using these materials before the general election you might want to hand this round. It should help people prepare for the event.

We're off: the 2010 General Election starts here!

The battle for the voters' support has started. Here at Take Part we want to make sure that this election is better understood and we can all form a critical view of what is being offered to us. What we want to do is follow the election campaign as it unfolds, the main themes as they emerge and the published Manifestos nearer the time of the election. We also want you to join in by answering questions and giving your views through the interactive questionnaire that we will use on the site.

So what is an election. It's a process that is designed to allow registered voters to pick a government. It's also a process of political management by the parties who seek to set the agenda, obviously to suit their own chances of winning your vote and accessing power. But, the issues on which the parties choose to fight might not be issues that you feel are the most important. So far it looks as though the election will be fought around the economy, the massive debt and the ways of balancing the books. There are many ways of approaching this; clearly we will all be affected, through wage and pension freezes, through cuts in public expenditure, through some forms of increased taxation. You might wonder why we all have

to suffer in this way when the finance sector, which caused the problem, looks less likely to suffer. Will one of the parties suggest that a more just way of approaching the cuts would be for the very rich to be made to contribute more to the solution?

What about education, social care, the NHS and social cohesion. As the cuts bite, what effect will it have on a society that is more unequal now than in many previous ones?

Another issue is climate change. What ideas will be put forward? Will they be enough and in time to make the necessary difference?

What about the war? We have now settled into the position of having a war on the go, usually in the Middle East, in Islamic countries, and it seems to be costly in terms of lives and expenditure. Do we think that it reduces terror at home or does it generate new hatred and more terror? What about all those admirals and air force commanders - are we fooling ourselves about our role in the world?

Corruption is another key issue. At a superficial level, politicians have been exposed for fiddling expenses, some on a staggering scale, but does it go deeper than this? What about the lobbying, the close contacts between the vast business interests, politicians and key civil servants. Is this damaging our democracy. Will any party put up ideas about this?

So, let's see what our manifesto would look like. Look at the list of key issues and put them into your order of priority.

Economy

Climate change

Corruption

Social cohesion

War

Other

If you want to go into the ideas a little more take a look at the democracy pamphlet. Here you'll find the views of local South Yorkshire people to whom we spoke last year.

If you want to record this you can use the survey facility on the Take Part Pathfinder website. Go to <http://www.takepartpathfinderyh.org>

4.00 Close the workshop and thank people for taking part!