

Liberal and General Studies Project progress report

Colin Waugh

Liberal and General Studies (LGS) was an arrangement that existed in FE and some HE institutions between the early 1950s and about 1990, in which young people who were employed as apprentices and given day-release to pursue vocational qualifications were required to undertake within this a non-examined element of general education, usually taught by arts or social science graduates.

The LGS project was initiated in 2013 by former LGS practitioners, the prime object being to rescue the LGS experience from oblivion. Between January 2014 and March 2017, interviews with fourteen women and 36 men who were former LGS practitioners were recorded and transcribed. Each interview takes the form of an oral history-style conversation, structured round twelve questions.

Relatively straightforward points to emerge about the interviewees include the following. The first to start teaching LGS did so in 1960. Fourteen started in the 1960s, 29 in the 1970s and seven in the 1980s. The average time spent teaching LGS was about eleven years. Between them, the interviewees taught LGS at 59 institutions across England. Nineteen of them underwent LGS-specific pre-service or early career FE teacher education. Forty said they devised their own teaching strategies and materials, either alone or with other practitioners. 37 said their relations with students were generally good. Most said their personal relations with vocational staff were good.

Four more open-ended questions were posed, as follows. 'Did you have a clear conception of what LGS was for [ie at the time]?' 'Which aspects of LGS do you now consider most worthwhile?' 'In your opinion, why did LGS cease to exist?' 'Should present-day FHE curriculum development take more account of experience in LGS?' Many interviewees are clearly still fired up

about LGS, and many gave complex, detailed answers to these questions. Analysing their responses requires that we bring to bear a conceptual framework based on the history behind LGS.

Two main frameworks seem relevant, one centred on continuation schooling and one on university extension. The first locates LGS in a series of attempts to introduce continuation schooling, others being through the 1918 Education Act, the 1944 Act (ie via County Colleges) and the Crowther Report (1959). The second sees LGS as an episode in the adult education tradition that goes back through the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), and the ideas and activities of A. D. Lindsay, R. H. Tawney, Michael Sadler, Arnold Toynbee, T. H. Green, F. D. Maurice and Samuel Taylor Coleridge - in short, the tradition in which upper class intellectuals, many of them Christian Socialists, sought to extend liberal education to working-class people.

By mapping interviewees' responses onto these frameworks, it is to be hoped that we can gauge how far LGS practitioners were beginning to develop - for themselves, from below - an independent conception of their own practice, and also the extent to which the way in which LGS was set up pushed them into doing so.

Vocational HE is undergoing global expansion. Technical courses have the potential to be massively educative, but only if an element of coherent, non-subject-based, general education can be integrated within them. LGS arguably constitutes the biggest single body of experience relevant to the development, by present-day teachers and students, of such general education.

We hope to produce in the near future a *PSE* occasional publication that addresses issues covered in the project interviews.