



Power Inquiry Sheffield

Event

Political Inclusion & Participation

“Have your say”

at

**Sheffield Hallam University,
The Stoddart Building, Arundel Gate, Sheffield S1**

Sunday 18th September 2005

Power Inquiry Sheffield Working Group

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Dedication and acknowledgements to our late Chairman, Paul Lowen

We are dedicating this, our first report, to our late Chairman, Paul Lowen, who passed away on 23rd March 2006, having been critically ill for a considerable while during 2005.

With great vision, Paul anticipated the Power Inquiry would continue as a major pressure group to encourage political involvement and participation. Our guiding light, Paul played a significant part in developing our strategy and thinking.

We were most fortunate to enjoy the benefit of his professional expertise to develop our survey questionnaire with co-author of 18 years, Wendy Stern. Together, they were instrumental in producing this report of our Event in September 2005 and set the standard for future publications.

Paul will be very sadly missed by us all with condolences to his family.

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Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to everyone who helped us to make our Event and report possible, particularly:

- Alex Hudson for essential technical support
- Awards for All for active efforts in trying to fund our Event for £1600, Nat West Bank for exceptional speed in opening an account within 3 working days and not least Pam Giddy, Power Inquiry Director for having fully supported our funding application.
- Bano Murtuja, a Power Inquiry Commissioner for her helpful inputs on various planning issues and referrals in the early stages
- Community centres and Wha'agwan for promoting our Event
- Karen Kerr for very generously volunteering and arranging colleagues so we could offer a non-chargeable crèche.
- Sue Collett, Market Development Manager, Conference 21 of Sheffield Hallam University and her colleagues

We are also profusely grateful to our speakers Ruggie Johnson, Helen Greer, Jack Scott and Joe Pritchard as well as our participants for having generously given of their time, shared expertise and discussed concerns with us.

Helen Greer deserves particular mention for so very kindly being Wendy Stern's speaker and as kindly agreeing to stand in, on short notice, for a speaker unable to attend.

PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spirit of the Power Inquiry, our Event gave people the right to discuss their concerns on the issues affecting political participation and inclusion. Our report and findings are a synthesis of such discussions which we consider represents the essence of issues raised.

Submitting our report to the Power Inquiry, however, does not endorse political opinions or parties whether or not invited to speak.

Our speakers led the way and like our participants did not shirk contentious, often disregarded issues affecting the relevance of politicians and politics to everyday life.

Concerns raised a diversity of issues in particular the inability of MPs to control and manage the Public Sector's pre-set agenda. The remarkable synergy between our debate and questionnaire also reflected the speakers outlined and considered in our report as follows:

- Access, accessibility and invisible disabilities;
- Tick-box mentality to ethnic minorities and disability;
- Ability of umbrella organisations to avoid accountability of public funds
- Virtual imagery which does not exist in reality
- Seeming apathy to politics and increasingly poor election turnouts
- Lack of debate affecting, for example, the Iraq war and Education
- Poor practices in regulatory frameworks and bodies with particular regard to:
 - financial services
 - housing
 - freedom of information
 - data protection
 - information technology, software licensing and piracy
 - pharmaceutical industry
 - medical and legal profession
- Endemic breakdown of regulatory, compliance and enforcement systems intended to protect us from poor business practices.

Much of this was ascribed to the failure of the governors to involve or inform the governed in the why's or wherefore's of decisions before enactment.

Poor relations between politicians and media were seen to add little value with regard to the compelling need to find long-term solutions rather than a quick fix particularly regarding the major consideration of constitutional reform.

Solutions mooted by our Participants were only seen to be achievable if politicians accepted that transparency and accountability are essential to medical, legal or administrative systems, which must be seen to be fair, just and equitable. As it stood, deep concern was raised over the relationships between the Public, Private and Corporate Sectors.

It is therefore entirely fitting to consider the invaluable contribution, which the internet has made to politics and single issue politics.

Although our report is anecdotal in its nature, the anger on issues raised could not be ignored by all of those present during the debate.

POWER Inquiry Sheffield Event Organisers

In Sheffield, the POWER Inquiry is fortunate to have a strong team of dynamic, enthused Ambassadors who relate to and understand the issues of political disaffection affecting our local community.

We represent a wide range of expertise, skills and abilities. POWER Inquiry Sheffield is privileged to claim 2 members with lesser known invisible disabilities of chronic pain, M.E. and voice loss. This strengthens our position in relation to the political concerns of people affected by invisible disability.

Our team comprises:

- **Nikki Ashworth**, involved in the Labour Party elections and recently returned from Sri Lanka where she assisted with the Tsunami Relief Projects.
- **Paul Lowen** a retired civil servant in the former DfEE who in his career drafted Ministerial Briefings, managed £3.5 million IT budget and Europe's largest employment databases.
- **Wendy Stern**, M.Sc. alumni of Sheffield Hallam University Business School and a freelance researcher. Wendy is a Trustee of a national charity and also involved with other community activities.
- **Sarah Weyman** who worked as Legislative Director for a U.S Senator in Washington D.C and on the John Kerry Presidential Campaign in Ohio and is now a Business Development Executive for the Guardian.

For all of these reasons we have been uniquely placed to augment the POWER Inquiry Commissioners' research with locally acquired empirical research data.