

RaPAL AGM 2019

Chair Report and 3 Year Review

My first Chair report in 2017 thanked the volunteers who work extremely hard in the fractions of time available outside their other commitments and livelihoods to keep RaPAL running, and our members for their commitment to improving the quality of life of adult learners. This hasn't changed. However, our membership and financial position have steadily improved over the last three years while we have sustained core activity.

At the AGM last year we undertook to invest in RaPAL through website refreshment with backend membership management, allocating print expenses for hard copies of Taster journals and an academic print run, and a development 'away day' for the editorial and/ or management group.

We have sustained a healthy management group. A management Away Day is arranged in Birmingham for 23rd July, and the face-to-face Annual Editorial Meeting is held on the first Saturday of September.

Journals

We have published nine digital journals, sustaining production of three per year; a 2017 hardcopy edition of the Taster journal and 2018 reprint; as well as the multi-format book *Resilience: Stories of Adult Learning*. The last year has seen the conference editions *Rethinking Participation* and *Collaboration and Connections*, as well as *Literacies in Different Spaces*. Each edition has a different team, supporting co-working and development across our membership and the sector. We are working towards a hardcopy academic edition of peer reviewed papers.

We have maintained a policy where the last two years' digital journals are available in the Members' Area of the website, and all prior editions are publicly available on the Past Issues page. In parallel, we have encouraged wider access to and distribution of specific editions of the journal through co-working agreements. For example, *Global Literacies* is available on the UCU Transforming Lives website; conference editions are disseminated to all conference participants regardless of whether or not they are members. We are now trialling wider public dissemination of one paper per edition. Our income from the Publishers Licensing Society has multiplied, suggesting increasing dissemination and usage of our publications, for example across the education sector.

Next year we publish our 100th edition of the journal, which started as a bulletin in 1985.

Conferences

We have co-organised a joint conference each autumn with the Learning and Work Institute, UCL IoE Post-14 Centre, UCU and NATECLA:

- *Resilience and Responsiveness*, Imperial College, London 2016
- *Impact and Innovation*, UCL IoE, London 2017
- *Rethinking Participation*, Westminster Kingsway College, London 2018

We are canvassing themes and contributions for this autumn's conference.

We have organised two RaPAL conferences:

- *Global Literacies: UK Literacies in a Global Context*, The Quaker Meeting House, Liverpool 2017

- *Collaboration and Connections*, University of Bolton 2018

Conferences are a bilateral investment and it takes some co-ordination to buy potential parties in to each project. This is increasingly the case where sector funding is in a spiral of decline, and business units require privately financed organisations to purchase their services rather than co-work to shared development objectives with mutual investment. We are canvassing options for a RaPAL conference through 2019/20.

Online Presence

We are delighted to have appointed Julie Collins as officer for Website Management and Jo Dixon as Digital Media Lead at the last AGM. Our highest number of website views continue to fall in the months in which a new digital journal edition is released. *Rethinking Participation* is the most visited page in the last year, after the Home page. This is followed by *Write for Us*, *Resilience: Stories of Adult Learning* and *Past Issues*. Search engines are our primary referrer, followed by our social media activity, then organisations we have worked with.

Membership

The Regional Advocates Co-ordinator position has not been filled and a number of advocates have had to step down, for example because of retirement. The Membership Secretary has been holding the position despite preferring to step down over a year ago. RaPAL is keen to develop its membership experience, and is continuing to investigate automation of some functions. New membership has demonstrated a steady increase, with Paypal proving popular, but securing renewal is a challenge.

Finances

The capital balance is recovering after several years of steady decline. This is primarily because digital publishing, which was one of our most significant expenses, continues to be free, and because we removed new admin support shortly after appointing. This puts us in a strong position for careful financial investment in target development activity.

Wider Sector Considerations

The Augur report has finally been released and calls for an increase in funding for Further Education in a rebalancing with Higher Education. With adult English and maths having assumed a quiet position in working priorities in recent years, adult literacy in the context of adult education provision is being specifically mentioned in, for example, a recent report by the Learning and Work Institute *2030 vision: Skills for economic growth and social justice* and by current candidates for Prime Minister in public campaigning. The adult learning sector has changed almost beyond recognition in recent years across adult, further and community education but also in a burgeoning private sector. We contributed to the reform of the national adult literacy standards and Functional Skills, which are in the process of launching, but have not fully grappled the impact of the wider context of change in qualifications and provision. There is high turnover of adult literacies (English and maths) tutors and shortages at critical levels nationally. A proposal to contribute to a *Strategy for English, maths and digital learning* has been supported informally by the management group.