



ruskincollege
learning to make a difference



Newsletter

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Barry McQuigan, former World Flyweight Champion and Micky Cantwell, former British Flyweight Champion called in to Stoke House on Thursday 1st November to meet with Alan Irwin to talk about education for boxers.

Barry was recently presented with the coveted Learner Champion award by the TUC for being such a great advocate for learning in amateur and professional gyms across the country.

After the meeting, Barry took time to speak with some of the full-time Cert Ed students to talk about their own experience of education and returning to learn as mature students.

Barry said.

“This is a wonderful place to come and study and I was so impressed with what I heard from the students and how committed they are to getting an education and dispelling the myth that there is some kind of age barrier to learning. That’s exactly what we want for boxers and their families. Boxing is a tough sport and few fighters can predict their future, even the most talented. The biggest mistake boxers can make and it happens time and time again, are that they don’t plan for the future. It is essential therefore that boxers organise and manage their time properly. Education and skills development should be an indispensable part of their structured day. We want each and every boxer, amateur or professional, to develop their skills so that they can have a future outside of boxing and places like Ruskin can offer them that opportunity.”

Alan Irwin



Principal's pages

Introduction

This first term of the new academic year sees the College almost full. For the first time, this includes third year BA groups in English Studies, Social Science and International Labour and Trade Union Studies. Dr Hilda Kean, the Acting Dean, is introducing systems to help improve retention and achievement.

Ofsted

I am delighted to report that we obtained a good Ofsted report right across the board. All our main grades were '2's, which means better than satisfactory. Sincere thanks to everyone who took part or provided support behind the scenes, particularly to Hilda Kean, who acted as College Nominee.



The inspection, which took place from 8th to 12th October, involved having five inspectors here for a week and the Lead Inspector also present for an additional two half-days the week before. This constituted 26 inspector days - a reduction from the originally envisaged 40 inspector days as a result of Dianne Hayter's kind intervention with Bill Rammell after the discussion at the summer Ruskin Council meeting. For three days in the middle of the main inspection week, we had two LSC auditors here as well, looking at finance and governance. At certain key points, all seven of the external people were calling for additional evidence, which put our office staff under great pressure - my sincere thanks to them for the marvellous way they coped with this and particularly to Eamonn Deeley, our MIS Officer. The final grades, from both the Ofsted inspection and the parallel LSC audit, mapped 100% onto our own self-assessment, making one wonder whether this was the best use of public money. However, getting such a good set of grades will mean that we will have desk-based annual monitoring and excellent quotes to use in marketing and PR. An expected move to greater college self-regulation and peer review is just getting under way and we have joined a pilot group with the other adult residential colleges.

Finances

The new Finance Director, Sally Courtney, together with the General Secretary and myself, have started a series of meetings in which we plan to take a complete overview of how the College works financially and where there could be opportunities to make savings or maximise income.

Curriculum and academic quality

Our new Quality Officer, Guy Langton, took up his post on 29th October and it is hoped that his appointment will make future quality audits, reviews and inspections less onerous on the rest of the staff. Guy will keep all the quality systems up to date and make it easier to report from them.

This year's validation events will include Youth and Community Work, which is moving from a Foundation Degree to a full Honours degree in line with becoming a graduate profession. We are acting on this a year ahead of the deadline because our validation is due. This is an exciting development for Ruskin and will give us our fifth BA. Two of the CertHE pathways, History and Women's Studies, are due for revalidation but we may take the opportunity to weave them into our existing degree structures in some way, since both have afforded progression routes for English Studies and for Social Science. We would still have CertHEs as exit points but we could offer students greater flexibility in their study options.

Property Strategy

The 'master' plan for the Headington site has been lodged with the City Council and our neighbours are taking issue with certain aspects as predicted, particularly the traffic they fear will be generated. The planners have been on our side to date but much depends on the strength of feeling expressed. The meetings at which our ideas will be presented are likely to take place sometime between November and January.



Work on the restaurant plans is proceeding, including ideas for naturally warming and cooling the building, for example by installing a pergola outside the proposed glazed wall, choosing the paving material carefully and altering the internal configuration to buffer the main seating area against the cold in winter. Finance Committee is looking at the overall budget for Phase 1 and will be making recommendations on how far and how fast to move forward. Plans for the wall around the walled garden are proceeding, including via some additional surveying for the main area of projected repair.

Conclusion

We are looking forward to settling down, post-Ofsted, and getting some real work done.

Professor Audrey Mullender
Principal
Ruskin College



The Ruskin-Thompsons Partnership

In October 2006 I commenced a two-year post at Ruskin College that has been generously funded by Thompsons solicitors.

Both institutions share a proud tradition of working within and supporting the growth of the trade union movement and as a past Ruskin Student (Labour Studies Diploma 1989-1991) I was particularly pleased to be the successful applicant for the post.

Trade Union Education

A critically important aspect of this work, is to ensure that Thompsons body of work is promoted thoroughly across Ruskin's programme of trade union education. This means, for example, that prominent cases led by Thompsons are used to help trade union activists develop their understanding of the law and how best to use it to defend their member's interests.

International and National Support

Both internationally and in the UK Thompsons also funds a broad range of political and trade union causes. In the run up to the recent local elections I was able to work closely with the Midlands TUC to ensure that their anti-BNP activity received financial assistance from Thompsons.

Internationally Thompsons is funding, amongst others, access to legal advice on trade union and human rights violations in Columbia and legal campaigns in South Africa for sufferers of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos.

Thompsons is currently calling for support for a campaign, Justice for Asbestos Families, which was launched at the end April.

I would be very grateful if members of the Ruskin Fellowship could show their support by signing the petition

The online petition can be signed at:
www.thompsons.law.co.uk/campaigns/justice-for-asbestos-families.htm

Ian Manborde
Deputy Trade Union Partnerships Manager
Thompsons Tutor in Trade Union Studies



Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda visits Ruskin

On Thursday 29th November, the Right Hon. W. Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, accompanied by Dr Carl Roberts, the British High Commissioner for that country, and Mrs Roberts, visited Ruskin College's Old Headington site. During his visit to Ruskin, Mr Spencer had lunch in Stoke House, Ruskin's flagship study centre for International Labour and Trade Union Studies, with a mixed group of staff, former staff from the early 1970s, and current students including some from overseas. After lunch, the Antiguan dignitaries took coffee with a group of trade union students from Unite, the new 'super union' formed by the merger of Amicus and the T&GWU.

Mr Spencer cancelled what should have been his engagement later that afternoon at the Oxford Union because of their controversial invitation to David Irving, the holocaust denier, and Nick Griffin of the BNP. (Ruskin students were amongst those demonstrating outside the Union only three days before the Antiguan visit.) Consequently, the visiting PM had time for an impromptu visit to Walton Street where he succeeded in finding his old room, complete with new resident who was charmed to invite him in for a chat. It was clearly a nostalgic day for Mr Spencer, who remembered a chip shop opposite the Walton Street building and a table tennis table visible from the front entrance.

Baldwin Spencer was a student at Ruskin from 1971 to 1973, where he studied a range of subjects including Industrial Sociology, Labour Economics and Industrial Relations. He also took classes in Politics, which he has clearly put to good use since. He came to Ruskin College as the natural home for a then trade union officer who anticipated a career in that field of work. His tutors at Ruskin had nothing but praise for him while he was here. His thesis, on 'Trade unions in the Caribbean: the case of Antigua', was highly regarded and could have been worked up for publication, had he so chosen. The Principal of the day predicted that Mr Spencer would make an effective contribution in his home country on his return but assumed that this would be confined to the field of industrial relations, through his trade union work.

Rather than complete his degree in the UK, however, Baldwin Spencer could not wait to rejoin the political struggle in his home country, where three opposition parties eventually combined to form the Progressive Party and swept away a less democratic, long-standing political dynasty. Mr Spencer, as the only one already holding a parliamentary seat, became the natural leader of the new party.

While in power, Mr Spencer has used his influence to encourage several leading trade unionists to come to Ruskin on Chevening scholarships (jointly funded by the UK Government, Ruskin and a British trade union). Two of them are now Senators. During his visit, he generously announced the establishment of an annual scholarship to Ruskin, to be funded by the Antiguan Government.

It was an honour and a delight to welcome such a distinguished visitor back to Ruskin.

Audrey Mullender



Welcoming the Antiguan delegation to Stoke House



The Principal greets the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda



Mr Spencer with his former tutors: Roy Moore and Harold Pollins



Summary of the key strengths from our recent OFSTED inspection

The OFSTED report of the inspection in October 2007 endorsed our self assessment of our work in the college as good and gave us grades of good (2) across the board. The inspectors recognized the long history of the college contributing to lifelong learning, widening participation and social justice.

The report recognized that we provide:

- Exemplary financial, personal and academic support
- Exceptionally good partnerships to reach disadvantaged and new learners
- Very effective strategies for engaging students with low aspirations and poor prior attainment

It realized our teaching was effective resulting in:

- High achievement rates on the certificate in higher education course
- High standard of students' work
- Highly effective promotion of learning
- Good student progression (onto other courses and employment)

It recognized that our students are successful and:

- Gain confidence and analytical skills and apply their knowledge
- Were confident and able to successfully research projects independently
- Thoroughly enjoy their work and take pride in their achievements.
- Many students make progress rapidly and successfully to higher education programmes.

It acknowledged that our tutors:

- Ensure students are consistently challenged with a good variety of tasks and activities.
- Quickly gain students' confidence by using lively interaction and creating good rapport.
- Break down barriers well
- Plan a variety of group and individual oral work which helps develop students' confidence and presentational skills.

It stated that the college is effective and:

- The residential aspect of many of the courses clearly supports the development of much good peer group learning which extends beyond the classroom
- Leadership and management of the curriculum are particularly effective in promoting an academic environment
- There is strong leadership and clear direction

What learners told inspectors they like about Ruskin:

- o That tutors are kind and patient – 'tutors can't do enough for you'
- o The environment and the way the staff create a sense of community – 'it's a wonderful place to learn'
- o The way tutors make lectures interesting, challenging and fun
- o Learning alongside other mature adults
- o The way learners are treated as individuals and feel able to express themselves – 'we can be ourselves and feel safe'

For the full report see the OFSTED website under colleges.

Dr Hilda Kean, Acting Dean, December 2007.



Newsflash

Short Course Success

Emma Howell, Short Course Co-ordinator at Ruskin, finalist in the 'Outstanding Innovation' category of the 2007 Quality Improvement Agency Star Awards for her work on embedding sustainability in the curriculum.



China Visits Ruskin

All China Federation of Trade Unions visit Stoke House December 2007 for a seminar on British Trade Unionism.



Contacts

The Fellowship has a number of local contacts and we hope to develop more. If you live near one of the areas below and would like to make contact and find out what goes on, email or phone for more information.

North East England

Nigel Todd (67-69)

Former student and Regional Secretary, WEA, North East Region.

Phone: 0191 4618100 or email: ntodd@wea.rg.uk

London

Carol Bonner (98-99)

Organises informal/irregular get-togethers in London in the evenings.

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Brighton

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