

Submission from Sheila Bawar

Dear Scottish Parliament,

I hope you do not mind an English person adding to your debate.
I subscribe to your Newsletter, as I find your policies more inspiring than in England at present!!

I was a primary school teacher, a social worker and, latterly, in a joint appointment between a local authority and a number of universities, taking social work students on placement.

I feel that it is difficult to cut through the inequalities in educational achievement in many working class areas because:

- the grief felt by many traditional working class communities eg mining communities, where the expectation and hope was for sons (at least) to follow in their fathers footsteps into those industries, many of whom have now gone.
- Negative experiences of parents and former generations in a family, who do not see education as having done anything for them-and this rubs off on their children
- unemployment in traditional working class employment areas acts as a disincentive for young people to strive in education
- Often negative expectations on the the part of teaching staff, in terms of potential success for working class students
- “Faithfulness” to your own community-which is often challenged by the educational “establishment”.

May I say, I came from a very poor family, but had parents who had been instilled (for various reasons) on the value of education by their parents. Hence, I was encouraged to achieve as a child at school.

However, that does not take away from the fact that I also had the pressures of many of the problems listed above (and if I took the time, I could find many others). I had teachers who believed in me; I had teachers who put me down. We also had expensive school uniforms; expensive school trips; and expensive lessons. My parents managed to provide for some of them, but “luxuries” were beyond their means.

May I say that the “prejudice” I see, in higher education (particularly in “caring” educational programmes) about working class people and communities is rife. When you add racial stereotyping as well (my father was Indian), it can become unbearable, and I am sure I was spotted as a “hot head” (to say the least) at both higher educational establishments I went to.

Alongside the prospect of leaving uni with high debts accrued, I can see how working class students would be “put off” to say the least. (I nearly walked out on both my higher education courses, because of stereotyping, but was gently persuaded to continue by tutors).

And, of course, the problem does not stop there. Once qualified and in employment, there is the continuation of being working class in predominantly middle class organisations, with the continued stereotyping or avoidance of professional responsibility which, again, weighs heavy.

Sorry to be so negative. I am all for equality and even positive action to encourage working class applicants to enter higher education, regardless of other elements of their backgrounds (eg race, disability, gender, sexuality), but you ask what the issues may be, and I have told you some from my personal and experience.

Yours,

Sheila Bawar