

THIRD SECTOR VOICES SUPPORT FOR UNIVERSITY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

“The idea of civil society over the years has been a driving force all over the world and in the shape of a university could provide the intellectual challenge the third sector is currently lacking” said Professor Martin Albrow, stating his case at the fifth and final public debate about lifelong learning and the third sector at the LSE on Monday evening. “A new university will be able to think things through and its autonomy and commitment are absolutely crucial” he added.

Chairing the well-attended debate organised by PrimeTimers, business skills supplier to the third sector, was David Walker, editor of The Guardian’s Public Magazine. The question ‘Is a University the Solution for the Third Sector?’ was posed and panel speakers included Stephen Bubb, Chief Executive, The Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO); Janet Fleming, Head of UK Workforce Hub; and Dr Francis Pinter, Visiting Fellow, LSE, Founder of Pinter Publishers and the Soros Foundation’s Central European University Press.

“The third sector is growing in power, influencing policies that are central to government reform and has become an increasingly popular and clear career choice for graduates” explained Stephen Bubb. “This would be a very 21st century university, not a building or a campus but a network, a community of scholars and students and ACEVO would support this very strongly” he continued.

As the fastest growing sector over the past ten years and an acknowledged important part of the UK economy, the burgeoning third sector does not have a centre of learning to unify it. An increasing number of people believe that now is the time to establish a university dedicated to third sector issues with the potential to draw in bright, talented students and teachers, who can come together to advance knowledge and skills to ultimately benefit civil society.

Widening the debate to include the international stage, Frances Pinter said: “A civil society university could do much more than service the UK – there is the rest of the world to consider”.

Janet Fleming put forward a more sceptical view about the need for a separate university, commenting: “Universities span the whole breadth of learning and the best teachers and students won’t be attracted to one that narrows itself down to the third sector”.

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