

Summary of an address to the OECD Glasgow Seminar

by Professor Don Aitkin AO
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'Education and Change'

The principal message I would like to leave with you is the importance of building in to your future a contemporary view of education. You have heard from Josef Konvitz that the most important statistic for all communities is the proportion of your young people completing secondary education. You have heard also how important it is to realise the potential of under-utilised assets (Glasgow has lots of them — they're called 'people'), how communities need empowerment if governance is to work, and how much better it is to prevent problems occurring than to fix them up afterwards.

Glasgow has three inter-connected problems. First, old patterns of employment have radically changed, but education systems are somewhat locked in the past. Second, 'new knowledge' firms draw in skilled workers from elsewhere, and provide little opportunity for Glasgow's workforce. Third, Glasgow possesses a society with marked stratification and a permanent 'underclass', parts of which have experienced three generations of unemployment.

These problems are understood, and they will not be overcome quickly. I suggest that the city adopt Howard Gardner's view of 'multiple intelligences' and the conclusion that all humans are intelligent enough to do almost anything, as long as they have adequate amounts of motivation, encouragement and preparation*. 'Glasgow – the well-educated city' seems to me the right slogan and perspective for the future. Japan and Singapore, which lack natural resources, have risen economically through developing the capacities of their people. Educate the children of Glasgow — all of them — for jobs that need qualifications. Well-educated societies are resilient, function well politically, possess the confidence to deal with their own problems, and display more democratic forms of government.

An education-led onslaught on Glasgow's inter-connected problems will improve the style of governance, diminish 'social inclusion' as a problem, and turn Glasgow into a skills generator which can export skills because it produces the skills that it needs for itself. It will not be an easy task, but it seems to me to be the way to go.

(*Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, New York, Basic Books, 1983)