

# Annual Conference Resolutions 2002

## TESTING

1. This SEA AGM notes the increasing frequency and value attached to the external testing of children which is having profound effects on their mental health and social and emotional behaviour.

This AGM also notes that the testing regime is designed to select children for an increasingly differentiated schools system reflecting social class divisions and the burdensome and expensive inspection bureaucracy that polices this system.

The AGM welcomes the comments by the prominent Chief Education Officer of Birmingham, Tim Brighouse, that the national curriculum introduced by the Tories is so prescriptive as to deserve the label of being 'stalinist' and further welcomes his comments deploring the unwelcome element of competition that has been forced on schools to attract pupils and therefore funding.

This AGM therefore supports:

- a. the introduction of the early years foundation stage and certain proposals in the 14-19 green paper which allow for more flexibility on curriculum content and teaching methodologies.
- b. the moves in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to variously abolish league tables and allow teacher driven assessment.
- c. the decision at the NUT conference this year to 'canvass and act upon members' opinions on reinstating the boycott of SATs as a step back to an acceptable balance between school based education initiatives and national educational frameworks.

2. Conference believes that there is considerable evidence that the endless over-testing of children, through the system of league tables and national tests, is having a detrimental effect on their education. The fear of failure from both schools and parents has brought about a situation where the curriculum has become distorted, as more and more schools teach to the test. In addition, there appears to be a rising number of parents employing private tutors to help enhance their child's grades.

Such a situation only serves to reinforce real inequality in our educational system. Therefore conference instructs the SEA national executive to call on the government to scrap the current national system of key stage tests at ages 7, 11 and 14, to scrap league tables and to ensure that educational policy and funding is based on the needs of all children.

## ACADEMY SCHOOLS

3. The SEA is opposed to the creation of Academy Schools which are fundamentally against socialist principles.

### 4. City Academies

The SEA calls on the Government to relinquish its attempt to overturn years of Labour history and to abandon the creation of City Academies (renamed Academies in the new Education Bill). These independent and partly selective schools largely paid for and wholly maintained by the taxpayer are managed by democratically unaccountable bodies and are enabled to worsen the pay and conditions of teachers and other employees. They constitute a direct attack on that comprehensive system of secondary education of which the Labour Party is justly proud and which has vastly raised educational standards and the life-chances of the children of this country.

## FAITH & SPECIALIST SCHOOLS

5. Conference believes that faith and specialist schools undermine the concept of an inclusive and integrated education system. The continued existence of selection at 11 years old in many areas is another major impediment to these aims.

It instructs the Executive to initiate a major enquiry into how such a system can be achieved.

**6.** This Conference of the SEA regards as utterly unacceptable the Government's policy on establishing specialist schools. Specialist schools, which enjoy extra funding, and whose admission arrangements permit 10 % selection by "aptitude", create a privileged tier of secondary education which undermines the comprehensive system to which Labour is committed. They are a Tory innovation by the pre-1997 Tory Government, taken over by Labour.

## **REDUCING INEQUALITIES**

**7.** The SEA should continue its attempts to oppose new Labour attempts to increase division, inequality and alienation. It should also increase its emphasis on laying down long-term goals for a non-alienating education system.

There should be a debate on the following issues:

- Ending admission policies based on estate agents, test scores, subjective rating, social standing and religious denomination.
- Setting expectations for quality of teaching, buildings and equipment and introducing a funding system to reduce inequality.
- Producing curriculum guidance, which is secular and free of the over-prescriptive assumptions of the national curriculum and literacy and numeracy hours.
- Introducing a vocational dimension to the education of all pupils, and dismantling the efforts to introduce an impoverished curriculum for working class pupils.
- Funding primary, secondary and tertiary education with the aim of increasing the participation of working class pupils at all levels - rather than excluding them, at the same time as claiming the achievement of inflated and fictitious targets.

## **THE 14-19 GREEN PAPER**

**8.** This Conference of the SEA while noting the wide range of issues covered in the Government's 14 -19 Green Paper, warns of the dangers to genuinely comprehensive education inherent in some of its proposals. We support a broad and balanced curriculum for the 14-16 year olds, including vital areas of schooling, e.g. in the arts, humanities, languages and technology.

We strongly oppose the creation within secondary schools of distinct vocational and academic pathways post 14, which would sharply differentiate one set of students from another, and create a sharply divided secondary system at 14. There should be a statutory requirement for all students up to the age of 16 to have a broad and balanced curriculum including vocational and academic elements.

**9.** The SEA welcomes the ambitious vision of the Labour government set out in the aims of the Green Paper 14-19: *Extending opportunities, Raising standards* but has serious reservations about some of its proposals, particularly those relating to

- selective pathways at 14+,
- the recreation of a vocational / academic divide,
- the dismantling of the national curriculum,
- the ambiguity as regards the future role of FE colleges,
- and the massive implications for both resourcing the changes and
- for teacher training and re-training.

## **COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

**10.** This conference supports a proactive stance on the gradual establishment of a truly inclusive education system through community schools rather than the current system based on impairment.

## **NON FORMAL EDUCATION.**

**11.** This Conference recognises that after two decades of neglect that the government in England and Wales have introduced a range of new policy and funding initiatives which have significantly boosted the essential contribution of non formal education services.

In particular this Conference welcomes the new commitments to community work, youth work and play work and the development of the new services and profession of learning mentoring in schools.

Conference believes that the consolidation and development of new government initiatives in England and Wales now demands greater rigour in terms of professional development and conditions of grant aid.

Conference notes with concern the lack of a Professional Code of Conduct and Ethical Committee for all those working with children and young people and the lack of criteria and monitoring arrangements for many of the new funding streams particularly those flowing into the voluntary sector.

Conference believes that it is in the government's interests to ensure consistent professional development among non format educationalists and that this can be best achieved by extending a collective bargaining framework through the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers to all related professional areas.

Conference notes with concern also that the progressive agenda adopted by the government requires the full support of local authorities and voluntary organisations.

Conference therefore calls on the Executive to.

1 Contact the JNC Committee and governments in order to encourage the extension of collective bargaining throughout this sector and to improve conditions of grant aid.

2 Contact the JNC Committee and governments in order to encourage the adoption of a nationally regulated code of ethics for all those working with children and young people.

3 Contact the local government associations and local authorities of England and Wales calling on them to ensure that allocated children's and young people's resources are spent appropriately.

4 Contact the leading voluntary sector organisations to encourage the adoption of national terms and conditions and regulated standards.

## **THE LEARNING COUNTRY**

**12.** This Conference congratulates the Welsh assembly on the bold and imaginative programme for Education set out in 'The Learning Country', and on consulting widely and effectively in drawing it up.

It commends the programme as the basis for a future Labour Education Manifesto.

## **PFI**

**13.** The SEA is appalled at the use a labour Government intends to make of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) in the provision of local education services.

· PFI is a recognised high-risk strategy which will require many schools to mortgage their budgets and buildings for 25-30 years to provide profit for the private sector.

· PFI is unethical arm-twisting of the highest order of LEAs by the Government, since it has ruled out any other possible alternative funding for capital costs.

· The cost of higher rates of borrowing in the private sector will be borne by local services and local employees.

· There will be no local political accountability for the running of local services.