

Annual Conference Resolutions 2004

1. Apprenticeships

The SEA welcomes attempts to encourage young people to continue in education after 16 believing that the main spurs to this would be the extension of Education Maintenance Allowances, a thorough revision of the whole secondary curriculum to make it a really comprehensive one rather than the old grammar school one with which we are still inflicted and the abolition of all selection at 11+.

We deplore, however, the announcement even before Tomlinson has reported, of the creation of young apprenticeships (YAs) which will allow 14- to 16-year olds to spend at least two days a week in the workplace. Work experience, we believe, has a place in the secondary curriculum but it should be for all students; this proposal is tantamount to lowering the school leaving age for some, and, despite Ministers' announcements, it is naive to believe it will not be for those considered difficult or low-achieving. We understand too that sometimes schools have to make special arrangements for students with special difficulties (e.g. school phobics) but this proposal for young apprenticeships is of quite a different order (1,000 students as from September 2004) and will allow schools under pressure of staffing inadequacies, tight budgets and league table requirements to shuffle off their responsibility for some of our most vulnerable students.

We call upon the Government to put the proposal on hold and consult widely with trade unions and the education sector as well as the public before proceeding.

2. Draft Disability Bill and Education

This Conference welcomes the publication of the Government's draft Disability Bill. We also welcome the Joint Committee on the Draft Disability Discrimination Bill's recommendation that the full bill should be introduced in this Parliamentary Session and call on the Government to accept and act upon this recommendation.

We also welcome the Joint Committee recommendation that all examination and standard setting bodies should be brought within the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and accordingly call upon the Government to remove the exemption from the Disability Discrimination Act for general examination bodies.

This Conference also notes that both councillors and school governors have planning duties under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. We believe that the experience of disabled councillors and governors is invaluable to this planning process and therefore believe that it is essential that their access needs are met. We therefore welcome the Joint Committee's recommendation that all statutory elected and appointed office holders are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act and call upon the Government to bring Governors within the scope of the Disability Discrimination Act.

We also welcome the Joint Committee recommendations that adequate protection must be provided by the full bill to protect disabled councillors from direct discrimination in appointments to an office or a committee. We also welcome the Joint Committee recommendation that disabled councillors should be entitled to the provision of auxiliary aides and services. We call on the Government to accept and implement both recommendations.

This Conference agrees to write jointly with the Labour Party Disabled Members Group to Charles Clarke MP, Andrew Smith MP and Maria Eagle MP as the relevant Ministers calling on them to support the proposals in this resolution.

3. Lifelong learning

The slump in participation in lifelong learning, as evidenced in the recent survey by N.I.A.C.E., particularly among pensioners, must be addressed.

Enjoyment of learning is being pushed aside by tests and targets and the effect of increased charges. Older people need the opportunity to enjoy learning for its own sake. The insistence on measurement of outcomes

militates against this. We therefore call on the Government to support the work of the W.E.A., the Adult Residential Colleges Association, U3A and kindred organisations.

4. Sure start

Conference welcomes the expansion of Sure Start and congratulates the Government on this initiative.

Conference calls on the Government to

- extend the scheme throughout the country
- ensure permanent funding is provided
- provide additional funding for the development of children's centres in all areas
- develop and implement a system of democratic control of all programmes.

5. Philosophy of Education

Conference believes that an understanding of Educational Philosophy should be an essential element of all teacher training courses.

6. 14-19 Education

Conference endorses the National Executive's response to the interim report of the Tomlinson Committee and emphasises the need to move away from an academic/vocational divide at 14 as exemplified by the idea of 'separate pathways'. Instead, it calls for 'academic' subjects to be linked more closely to the world of work so that they are relevant and interesting to all pupils.

7. Testing and League Tables

Conference reaffirms its opposition to national tests at key stages 1,2 and 3 as educationally harmful to children. It welcomes the abolition of Key Stage 1 SATs in Wales and the Daugherty Review recommendation that Key Stage 2 and 3 tests be dropped also.

It notes that Scotland has decided to scrap league tables and to replace the 5-14 testing regime with a sampling model of assessment.

It calls upon the Secretary of State to initiate an enquiry in England to establish the effects of key stage tests and league tables and to bring forward proposals for their replacement.

8. Selection at 11

The SEA welcomes the bigger budgets allocated to education and the proposed extension of nursery education announced by the PM at the NAHT Conference. We demand, however, that the Manifesto for the next General Election includes an unambiguous restatement of the Party's commitment to non-selective secondary education and of the intention to implement this policy. This means:

- a) The abolition of grammar schools in those areas where they still exist and their replacement by non-selective comprehensive schools
- b) To end the unequal funding caused by the creation of specialist schools
- c) The transfer of Academies back to their previous democratically elected owners
- d) A broad and balanced curriculum from 11 to 16 for all children to allow all pupils to benefit from subjects such as the arts, humanities and modern foreign languages instead of some children spending two days a week learning a trade.

9. Private finance

A. Conference condemns, despite increases, the inadequate public funding and increasing use of private finance of the State's education service.

In the interest of equal opportunities, Conference instructs the Executive to continue to campaign against the expansion of Academies, the use of PFI funding, the dependence on private teacher agencies and the outsourcing of LEA services. Conference further instructs the Executive to lobby the Government on these issues and to join forces with appropriate trade unions in this anti-privatisation campaign.

B. The SEA calls on Ministers to research and publish the relative costs over the contract time of building a school through public finance compared to doing it through PFI.

10. Academies

A. The SEA notes the proposed rapid expansion of Academies before any have existed long enough to gauge their effectiveness or their effect on surrounding schools. It continues to be opposed to the creation of these independent schools largely financed by the DfES but run by private sponsors with little or no accountability to their local communities and with the ability to break up national agreements on pay and conditions for staff.

B. The SEA calls on the Government to ban the use of public parks for accommodating independent Academies.

11. Charitable status for private schools

As part of the proposed revision of charity law the SEA calls upon the Government and the Charity Commission to implement the spirit as well as the letter of the notion of 'public benefit' by ending charitable status for those private schools which cater only for the most privileged children in our society by means of selection, fees and/or bursaries solely for the most able.

The award of charitable status should be decided on the basis of ALL that a private school does, but, in particular, its main function and the consequences for public good or ill, not just on a few peripheral activities, at minimal cost in relation to their main expenditure, adjacent to their main function, carried out without compulsion for a variety of reasons and unnecessary for the successful working of the school.

In estimating 'public benefit', criteria such as the following should be observed:

- 1 Each school must make its own case.
- 2 Activities which the school undertakes in and with the community, at its own cost, over and above what might be expected as part of the function of any school, should be taken into consideration.
- 3 The main factor in any assessment must, however, be how it operates as a school, with particular attention to such criteria as these:
 - To what extent does it EXCLUDE sections of the public by its entry policies?
 - How far does this mean that the school caters largely only for the most privileged?
 - What effect does this have on publicly funded provision for the education of the whole community?
 - By how much does the resource provision (per capita spend, pupil/teacher ratio) match or exceed that in the community's schools?

The SEA urges the private sector to respond positively to this challenge by abandoning its selective, exclusive policies, where they exist, and, in the spirit that many of the schools' founders acted upon, by making their resources available equally to the public as a whole, not just a small segment of it.

12. Religious Education

At a time when greater tolerance and understanding of different beliefs and religions is greatly needed, an expansion of faith schools will achieve exactly the opposite. We call for R.E. in all schools to be determined by the local SACRE committee thereby ensuring that we have religious education, not indoctrination.