

SEA Conference Resolutions 2015

1. National curriculum

Conference notes the state of the national curriculum (NC) in English schools is deeply unsatisfactory. Government has imposed a rigid NC which the Prime Minister has said is vital for national progress. At the same time it does not apply in academies and free schools. It is regarded as essential for national progress that the restrictions of the NC shall be removed so they can innovate and make improvements allowing each school to be autonomous and different from all other schools.

Conference notes that in reality the government is not allowing autonomy and the policy is to impose a right wing national curriculum by the back door, including phonics and Ebacc, which is not subject to any consent by non Tory forces. Conference therefore resolves to campaign for a national curriculum to apply to all state schools without exception, but that this shall be devised by an independent commission and not by temporary politicians.

Trevor Fisher

2. Further Education

The SEA urges the Labour Party to adopt the Further Education Agenda as a high priority policy and campaigning issue within its Education Policy over the period of the current government and leading up to the next General Election.

This area of education is extremely important because more than 50% of young people aged 16-18 attend Further Education Colleges, including those studying in Sixth Form Colleges, as well as many thousands of adult students studying from basic levels of study to degree level and above.

Specifically, SEA urges the Labour Party to fight against the unreasonable Conservative Government policies which:

- are changing the arrangements for Maths and English qualifications for young people. The position for 2014/15 is that all full-time students have had to study either GCSE Maths and/or English if they do not have it already or they have been able to study a stepping stone qualification towards GCSE – generally functional skills at Level 1 or 2. However, the change for the 2015/16 funding guidance is that any young person entering College with a grade D or less in GCSE Maths and/or English MUST be enrolled on the appropriate GCSE course. This means that they must be enrolled on both Maths and English if they entered College with D's or less in both. This is to impose a highly demotivating and unsuitable programme of study on these young people, with the consequence that a high proportion will fail their exams. What is needed is to integrate Maths and English within vocational qualifications studied by young people in a way that is relevant to the particular industry sector. This will be far more meaningful for the students and actually provide an incentive for continuing to study
- undermine full-time vocational programmes on the basis that apprenticeships are the solution to everything. The government's target of 3 million apprenticeships is unrealistic if

quality is to be maintained and given that attempts to engage more employers in apprenticeships appear to have failed since the 1970's. The Government is missing the point that full-time vocational programmes are crucial in preparing young people for either apprenticeships, employment or higher education. The Government is not asking the same question about the value of A Levels and there is a grave danger of worsening the divide in the perceived value of vocational versus academic routes

- are imposing punitive levels of tuition fees on unemployed adult students, including courses leading to a vocational qualification which will lead to employment
- continue to reduce adult education funding. This exacerbates issues of social and economic exclusion and will undoubtedly constrain economic growth in the most challenging areas
- continue to impose annual and in-year overall cuts in Further Education funding making matters really difficult for colleges - many are now in grave financial difficulties as a consequence

Joanna Tait

3. Child Poverty

The Conference notes rising austerity facing children and their families and how it undermines education. The number of children in poverty has substantially increased from 2 million in 1969 to 3.5 million today. Unequal childhoods are now a permanent feature of British life; a child from a disadvantaged background is still far less likely to do well in their GCSEs at 16 years old.

The Conference also notes education cannot compensate for society. Every Child Matters has been abolished and cuts to local authorities' budgets mean disadvantaged children and their families are less supported in communities. Teachers are picking up the pieces.

The Conference requests the executive to arrange talks with the shadow education team on the need to adopt child poverty and economic inequality reduction as key objectives by:

- a) asking the Labour Party leadership to place tackling child poverty and reducing economic inequality at its heart of engaging with all constituencies
- b) developing a cross-party strategy to reduce child poverty and economic inequality
- c) standing up for the welfare of disabled parents and their children as well as hard working families
- d) developing an 'inequality test' to measure the economic impact of government policies across the domains of childhood wellbeing

Alan Gurbutt

4. Collaboration between Schools

"Conference is dismayed at the demise of LAs and the ideological attack on state education. Labour should commit to a democratically accountable means of providing a good school in every local community.

However, many schools are now in a position where voluntary academisation is the only way forward. Not to do so, is to leave schools open to forced academisation as part of predator academy chains.

Networks of collaborative working schools are now looking at multi-academy trusts as a preferred way forward. Flat MATs (non hierarchical trusts), seem a way of ensuring protection in numbers, equal status within the trust without lead schools.

Conference calls on SEA, teacher trade unions and the Labour Party to formulate policy and practical guidance, as a matter of urgency, to inform decisions of school governors, teachers, and parents in resolving these difficult choices."

Richard Sidley

5. SEA Organisation

In 2015-16 the SEA should focus on developing its campaigning and lobbying capacity as part of a broader review of its strengths and weaknesses.

As part of this process, the SEA should survey its membership in order to build a picture of its current membership with a view to harnessing their support for its work. The process should seek members' approval for the careful sharing of contact information. The survey should be completed before the May 2016 NEC meeting.

Paul Martin

6. SEA Recruitment

This Conference / AGM calls upon the NEC to consider how best to recruit, involve and develop younger members to be the organisation's future leaders.

Paul Martin

7. SEA Finance

This Conference / AGM instructs the incoming NEC to agree a draft budget for 2015-16 no later than 31st December which identifies main headings for income and spending, including a development fund.

Paul Martin

8. Priorities for 2015-16

Conference recognises the scale of the Labour defeat on May 7th means that over the next five years the education system in England faces possibly irreparable damage, and certainly irreparable damage to the pupils passing through. SEA has to work for immediate changes along with an end of austerity.

In this context, Labour party work will continue to be a priority, but the immediate issue has to be to work for a wider public campaign against the Tories with the object of preventing damage to teacher supply and school finance. The focus must be on working with the unions, which will be in the front line over the next year and beyond

SEA will therefore prioritise working with sympathetic unions and through the Reclaim Education Alliance the broadest possible public campaign through the next year to block the damage coming from the Tory proposals.

Trevor Fisher

9. Accounting for Labour in the election

Conference expresses its shock at Labour's disastrous election performance. It notes that despite five years of damaging policies by the coalition, education virtually vanished from the election campaign. The Tory removal of Gove for Morgan removed any need for fundamental debate as far as the media were concerned. Labour did not offer a change of direction or offer a coherent case for such a change

Conference rejects Tristram Hunt's view that the problem was due to Ed Miliband's lack of interest in schools. The Labour front bench team had the responsibility to challenge Tory policy. It failed to expose fully the fallacies of that policy and was too prone to mute criticisms of Coalition development and the LibDem failure to check the direction of travel. It is essential that we scrutinise the reasons for these weaknesses to establish how best to put the progressive case at the forefront of educational debate.

We therefore resolve that the SEA will assess the reasons for Labour's poor performance on education in the years leading up to May 7th, preferably together with other sympathetic organisations. It will seek to involve members in this initiative and will report to the wider movement within the next twelve months on the barriers to be overcome if Labour is to situate itself on the side of progressive educational ideas.

Trevor Fisher

10. Working more effectively with allied organisations

This Conference welcomes the work done at national level with the other members of the Reclaiming Education alliance, but believes there are three key areas to develop, namely:-

- a) Producing a range of briefing documents co-operatively that can be customised by each of the participants
- b) Sharing intelligence not only policies but about other opinion-formers and lobbyists
- c) Agreeing how supporters of the different organisations can more easily work together in local campaigns

Paul Martin

11. Reclaiming Education

The SEA pledges to continue working with the Reclaiming Education Alliance in pursuit of policies that have wide appeal and are in the interests of all people involved in education.

Martin Doré

12. A National Vision for Education

The Conference notes unpiloted changes to education create instability, inequality and uncertainty for all concerned parties, hence the need to develop an inclusive vision for education, one that includes parents from all backgrounds, teachers, unions, students, academics and politicians.

In light of the General Election, Labour not only faced defeat in the North and South, those in deprived coastal and rural localities voted for UKIP; the party with the least to say about education.

Therefore, the Conference agrees to promote a) Government and Politics to be on the National Curriculum to inform votes at 16, and b) to develop a National Education Commission with the Labour Party, interested individuals, organisations and groups from all areas of the country.

Alan Gurbutt

13. Influencing Labour policy

Conference notes that;

a) After the very disappointing general election result, comprehensive state education is under serious threat from a reactionary Conservative Government.

b) Despite the educational manifesto demands of the major teacher unions and the ' Reclaiming Education Bill 2015 ', produced by the Reclaiming Education Alliance, the PLP election manifesto pledges appeared to marginalised education as a whole.

Therefore this S.E.A. conference calls on our National Executive to arrange talks, after the leader and deputy leadership elections, with the members of :

- 1) the PLP opposition educational front bench,
- 2) the LP members of the education select committee and the SEA parliamentary branch.

Then to ensure in these talks that the Labour Party firmly re-establishes the guiding principle of equal opportunities for all children, when drawing up a rescue package for state education.

Christine Newman