

# The Way Forward

*Professor Richard Pring, President of SEA*

Following the evolution of the education system over the 40 years since Prime Minister Callaghan's Ruskin College speech, what, in the light of problems emerging, should be the direction of change for the next generation?

## 1 *Limit the power and control by central government*

Problems have arisen from concentration of so much power in the hands of a Secretary of State, who is not accountable even to Parliament for many of the decisions made. Those problems include:

- ✧ constant changes to examinations and qualifications which have limited time-span or need soon to be reversed - to the frustration of employers, universities and teachers. There needs to be a pause and wide deliberation before further 'reforms' are proposed and the establishment of an independent Examination and Qualifications Council to organise that deliberation and to make final decisions.
- ✧ initiative after initiative made in relation to election-driven time-tables or in response to 24/7 media interests, rather than to well-researched deliberations.
- ✧ persistent tinkering with curriculum content which should be left to subject and pedagogical experts.

## 2. *Create a 'middle-tier' between schools, colleges and government*

The pursuit of 'choice' within what has become a 'market of schools', with the drastic weakening of local education authorities, has led to fragmentation of schools, to competition rather than to collaboration between them, and to expensively created extra places in some areas with the lack of school places in others (whilst pupil numbers are rising). There is a need, therefore, for a 'middle-tier' of organisation to ensure

- ✧ there are the right schools and colleges in the right places;
- ✧ schools and colleges work in partnership to ensure a fair spread of scarce resources and staff;
- ✧ those schools receive good advisory support when needed.

## 3. *Create a more rational and uniform system of schooling.*

There is now a bewildering variety of schools ('free', sponsored academies, academy chains, grammar, UTCs, local authority community, voluntary aided, voluntary controlled), each with distinctive forms of governance, funding arrangements, and control over admissions. Sense needs to be restored through

- ✧ total transparency of funding, governance and admissions;
- ✧ not allowing the creation of secondary modern schools through the expansion of grammar schools, either as new schools or as expansions of existing ones;

- ⤴ restoration of local accountability of all schools receiving (directly or indirectly through charitable status) public funding.

#### 4. *Ensure equal funding for pupils across schools and colleges*

One result of the many different types of school, arising from different forms of sponsorship, is that the unit of resource varies from school to school often without educational or social justification. It is important that

- ⤴ an agreed common funding formula be established for all pupils at the different age levels, irrespective of type of school;
- ⤴ grounds for exception (e.g. special educational needs) should be universally agreed and applied;
- ⤴ the deficit funding currently applied to post-16, especially to FE, should be rectified.

#### 5. *Trust the teachers*

The quality of teachers is essential to good education – well educated, well trained, well supported professionally, well respected and well paid. There is, however, a crisis in recruitment and retention. Teacher supply has been worsened by Schools Direct filling only 61% of the places allocated in 2014. Provision of training is increasingly fragmented as its traditional prevalence in universities is receding. It is essential, therefore, to

- ⤴ establish an independent College of Teaching (similar to the Royal College of Medicine) as an independent professional body for the regulation and support of teachers, for the provision of guidance on the training of teachers, for advice to Government and for the link between teachers and the Secretary of State;
- ⤴ require all teachers to have Qualified Teacher Status following an approved training course;
- ⤴ ensure all teachers are entitled to regular 'Continuing Professional Development'.

#### 6. *Make accountability of schools and teachers supportive rather than punitive.*

Characteristic of recent years has been increased accountability through examination results, testing and data-driven inspection by Ofsted. This has created a climate of fear, teaching to the test, and failure to do justice to the wider range of educational aims and achievements. It is important therefore to revert to a system of accountability which

- ⤴ is based on professional judgement rather than on raw data;
- ⤴ supports teachers in their efforts to improve their teaching;
- ⤴ reforms Ofsted so that it helps rather than punishes struggling schools;
- ⤴ encourages self-evaluation, monitored by other teachers.

#### 7. *Promote curriculum development, not imposition*

‘There is no curriculum development without teacher development’. The curriculum, within a broad national framework should be developed by teachers who know their subject and know their pupils. It should not be controlled by whichever Government comes into power and at the whim of the ever-changing Secretaries of State. To assist schools in this task there is a need to

- ✦ establish a National Council for Curriculum Development, membership to have wide representation from teachers, professional associations, universities, employers, inspectorate, government, wider community;
- ✦ support curriculum development by research evidence, including teacher research which could be part of CPD.

#### 8. *Examining and qualifications*

Qualifications, and the examinations leading to them, have been in constant change, often with a short life and often reversed after initial experience. This makes life exceedingly difficult for the teachers who have constantly to change their courses and for universities and employers who depend on the qualifications for recruitment. It is important to

- ✦ differentiate the different functions of testing and examining (formative and summative; international comparisons, national standards, school performance, personal achievement, remedial needs);
- ✦ establish an independent Council for Examinations and Assessment with wide representation, and be integrated with the proposed National Council for Curriculum Development - we have been here before – several times!)

#### 9. *Promote technical education and training*

The country has constantly failed to respect and to provide good quality technical education and training, as reflected in Acts of Parliament and Government papers ever since the 1851 Great Exhibition. The creation of City Technology Colleges and University Technical Colleges, together with the 14-19 Diploma in Engineering, are recent attempts to rectify this. It is important

- ✦ to maintain this momentum and to ensure such opportunities are available for all and included in any new curriculum framework such as a Bacculaureate.

#### 10. *Restore pre-vocational education in schools and colleges*

At a time when all young people are to be in some form of education and training until 18, ways should be considered in which education can be based on more practical and occupational interests. Hence, there is a need to

- ✦ examine again the thinking and practices which were developed through the pre-vocational initiatives which took place within the last 40 years;
- ✦ ensure greater partnership between schools, colleges of further education and employers, essential for success.

#### 11. *Benefit from the revolutionary developments within this generation of ICT*

ICT and the electronic revolution have opened up immense possibilities for improvement of learning: distance learning in HE (e.g. MOOCs); on-line tutoring and seminars in schools and colleges; virtual social areas and laboratories for the house-bound and excluded (e.g. NISAI); and teacher collaboration and curriculum development. Therefore, it is essential

- ⤴ to build urgently on what has been achieved so far through teacher professional development and ready access to the necessary resources

12. *Restore 'proper' apprenticeships*

Vocational education is essential, but much was of low standard, and not providing the necessary link between the hopes of students and the needs of employers. It is important to preserve the high standard of skill traditionally associated with apprenticeships and improve the routes through apprenticeship to employment. To that end there is need

- ⤴ not to let quantity diminish the meaning and quality of apprenticeships;
- ⤴ make it easier for employers to take on long-term apprenticeships.

13. *Prioritise independent and professional careers guidance for all*

Provision of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to students from 14 upwards is patchy and limited, yet essential if pupils are to know availability of apprenticeships, the different university courses available, and possible employment opportunities. Hence,

- ⤴ to ensure every secondary school and college of F.E. has ready access to a professionally staffed, independent and well-informed IAG;
- ⤴ to provide courses in school about the different routes to a chosen career.

14. *Reconsider the nature, shape and funding of the higher education system.*

It is half a century since the Robbins Report. Higher education has changed, partly through fees now charged and through much wider access and differentiation of higher education functions. Particular issues, however, have arisen through the development of open access, the greater importance attached to research, the entry of foreign and for-profit providers, and the corporate nature of current universities. Therefore,

- ⤴ this is the time for another major and comprehensive report – Robbins Mark II.

15. *Pause, think, deliberate preferably for two years before further 'reforms'*

In the past 150 years, successful and long-standing reforms have followed major and comprehensive reports by commissions established to address problems (e.g. on the future of higher education, on examination reform, on developing a secondary school system). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century these were called Royal Commission. In the post-1944 era, they were commissioned by the Central Advisory Committee. They took time to consider every aspect before finally making recommendations and only then to legislate. Therefore,

- ✧ Before any more reforms, a public enquiry should be established into the range of issues raised above, with representatives from the many interested parties, based on evidence, relevant research, and public debate. Finally (after two or three years) a report to Government might well make recommendations for reform.