

Early Years, Education and Skills:
Towards a National Education Service



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Labour's vision

The principle of a National Education Service (NES) was not only a key element of our 2017 manifesto, but is central to the Party's policies and wider vision. From our investment in early intervention and Sure Start Centres, to the establishment of the comprehensive school system and the Open University, we have demonstrated our commitment to progressive reform in education. We want to build on this proud legacy. Our ambition is of a National Education Service providing an excellent education for all those who need it, available from cradle to grave.

The values that will underpin the NES were outlined at Labour Party Conference last year by Angela Rayner MP, the Shadow Education Secretary. These principles will now form the basis of a wider consultation, within and beyond the Labour Party, on how this policy will be developed.

The Conservatives have created an education system that is increasingly fragmented, and, for too many, inaccessible. The drive towards academisation since 2010; an early years and childcare system divided into a complex series of both demand and supply side entitlements and subsidies; and a system of both higher and adult education that is increasingly reliant on personal debt, has made it harder for learners and their families to navigate the system and to access it whenever they need to.

Issues

The development of the NES is the key focus for Labour in developing education policy before the next General Election. The development of the NES will underpin all other policies and reforms. This means that getting the framework right is crucial.

The NES is important in addressing both the social and economic challenges that Britain faces in the years ahead. It has always been one of Labour's central beliefs that everyone, whatever their background, should be given the opportunity to reach their potential, to succeed not just in the world of work but in their own development. The NES seeks to extend this opportunity to everyone, at any time in their life, regardless of their circumstances or background.

As Britain prepares to leave the European Union, and undergoes wider economic changes as new industries emerge and the world of work changes, equipping people with new skills throughout their lives will be imperative; from young people passing through school needing to develop skills that will respond to the economy of the future, to those currently in work who will seek to retrain and advance in their current professions or move to new industries. The NES will underpin Labour's plans to transform our economy, and to ensure that prosperity is shared by the many, and not simply held by the few.

Labour's Policy in the 2017 manifesto

In our 2017 General Election manifesto, we outlined a series of policies that were the first steps towards the NES, beginning in the early years and continuing through the adult learning. These policies included:

- Expanding early years education to 30 hours a week for all 2-4 year olds, as well as moving towards a system of supply-side funding, with additional subsidised provision over and above the 30 hours, and a move towards a graduate-led workforce to improve the standard of education within settings.
- Reverse the cuts to schools budgets since 2015, and protect budgets in real terms over the course of a Parliament, as well as introducing a genuinely fair National Funding Formula in which no school loses out.
- Make further education free at the point of use, for all those who need it at any stage of their lives, making lifelong learning for all a reality.
- Scrapping university tuition fees.
- Bringing back both the Education Maintenance Allowance and university maintenance grants, to ensure that money is never a barrier to remaining in education for students of any background.

What next?

The policies in our manifesto were followed by the publication of a draft charter for the National Education Service, announced by the Shadow Education Secretary at Labour Party Annual Conference in 2017. The next stage in developing the NES is to consult on and develop this Charter, to ensure that we are working from the correct principles, and to identify the policy questions we will need to answer in taking the vision of a National Education Service forward.

Part of this process will be a wide-ranging consultation on the principles that are outlined in the draft Charter. Some of the pertinent questions are outlined below.

Questions:

- What should a National Education Service be for and what values should it and the draft charter embody?
- What amendments, if any, should be made to the principles outlined in the draft Charter for the National Education Service?
- What additional principles should be considered for the Charter of the NES?
- What barriers currently exist to cooperation between education institutions, and what steps can be taken to remove them and ensure that cooperation is a central principle of our education system?
- Through which channels and mechanisms should the public be able to hold educational institutions to account, and how should this vary across different educational bodies?
- What steps can be taken to reduce the fragmentation of the education system, and to move towards an approach that is integrated and promotes lifelong learning?
- What steps can be taken, in particular with relation to qualifications and staffing levels, to improve the quality of early years education?
- What steps can be taken to achieve genuine parity of esteem between academic and vocational/technical education, and to improve outcomes for those young people who do not choose to follow what is seen as the traditional academic route?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that the NES has the staff it needs, in particular with reference to the ongoing crisis in teacher recruitment and retention?
- What steps can be taken, at both the training stage and during continuing professional development (CPD), to ensure that teachers and support staff have the knowledge and resources they need to teach the whole curriculum? For instance, with reference to mandatory, age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

As Labour continues to build on its General Election manifesto in anticipation of entering Government, the draft charter sets out the principles that will structure and guide the National Education Service.

Labour will consult on these principles across the education sector and beyond, building a wide consensus on the fundamentals of a cradle-to-grave education system which will support everyone throughout their lives.

The key principles are:

1. Education has intrinsic value in giving all people access to the common body of knowledge we share, and practical value in allowing all to participate fully in our society. These principles shall guide the National Education Service.
2. The National Education Service shall provide education that is free at the point of use, available universally and throughout life.
3. The National Education Service provides education for the public good and all providers within the National Education Service shall be bound by the principles of this charter.
4. High quality education is essential to a strong and inclusive society and economy, so the National Education Service shall work alongside the health, sustainability, and industrial policies set by democratically elected government.
5. Every child, and adult, matters, so the National Education Service will be committed to tackling all barriers to learning, and providing high-quality education for all.
6. All areas of skill and learning deserve respect; the National Education Service will provide all forms of education, integrating academic, technical and other forms of learning within and outside of educational institutions, and treating all with equal respect.
7. Educational excellence is best achieved through collaboration and the National Education Service will be structured to encourage and enhance cooperation across boundaries and sectors.
8. The National Education Service shall be accountable to the public, communities, and parents and children that it serves. Schools, colleges, and other public institutions within the National Education Service should be rooted in their communities, with parents and communities empowered, via appropriate democratic means, to influence change where it is needed and ensure that the education system meets their needs. The appropriate democratic authority will set, monitor and allocate resources, ensuring that they meet the rights, roles, and responsibilities of individuals and institutions.

9. The National Education Service aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism. Educators and all other staff will be valued as highly-skilled professionals, and appropriate accountability will be balanced against giving genuine freedom of judgement and innovation. The National Education Service shall draw on evidence and international best practice, and provide appropriate professional development and training.
10. The National Education Service must have the utmost regard to the well-being of learners and educators, and its policies and practices, particularly regarding workload, assessment, and inspection, will support the emotional, social and physical well-being of students and staff.

