



# Education Politics

Journal of the **Socialist Educational Association**

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## ***THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE*** **FROM VISION** **TO REALITY**

John Bolt, *SEA General Secretary*

When the concept of a National Education Service was first put forward in 2015, it received an almost universally positive reception. The idea that education from cradle to grave could again be an entitlement for all is an exciting and inspiring vision. The Socialist Educational Association shared that enthusiasm and was keen to join

in the process of turning that initial concept into something concrete. The September 2017 of our journal, Education Politics, was devoted to that theme. It focussed particularly on education outside and beyond school – areas that were central to the initial NES concept while also being ones that have been damaged most severely since 2010.

However, three years on there remain many unanswered questions. A year ago, a ten-point charter was published. These were to be the founding principles of the NES. There is much to welcome in that document – the commitment to education free at the point of use, to education as a public service not a private good,

*continued on page 4*



**Inside:** Richard Hatcher **David Pavett** Emma Hardy MP **Kevin Courtney** Louise Regan **Pam Tatlow**  
**Melissa Benn** Tom Unterrainer **Sal Morawetz** *Cartoons by Polly Donnison*

## What's inside?

Page 6: Abolish Academies and Grammar Schools

Page 10: For Socialism and Education

Page 11: Ready for Work?

Page 12: Abolish National Standards

Page 14: Life Lessons

Page 17: Lifelong Learning

Page 19: Our NES

Page 21: Mental Well-Being

Page 23: Ofsted

Page 25: Higher Education

## About *Education Politics*

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**Editors:** Louise Regan and Tom Unterrainer

**SEA General Secretary:** John Bolt

**Email:**

[secretary@socialisteducationalassociation.org](mailto:secretary@socialisteducationalassociation.org)

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# Editorial

Our schools and universities are in crisis. To be blunt, nothing other than a complete overhaul of the education system in this country will remedy the situation. What this means in practice is that a future Labour government will have to address a whole number of problems simultaneously.

The order of the task at hand is many times more complex than the 'meddling', 'reforms', grand schemes and fantasies that have passed for government education policies over the past few decades. The solutions to these problems cannot be summarised by mantras or pithy slogans. Neither will they be addressed by 'cracking down' yet further on the teaching profession, stigmatising children and young people or by scapegoating of any kind. Rather, the starting point is to recognise the crisis for what it is.

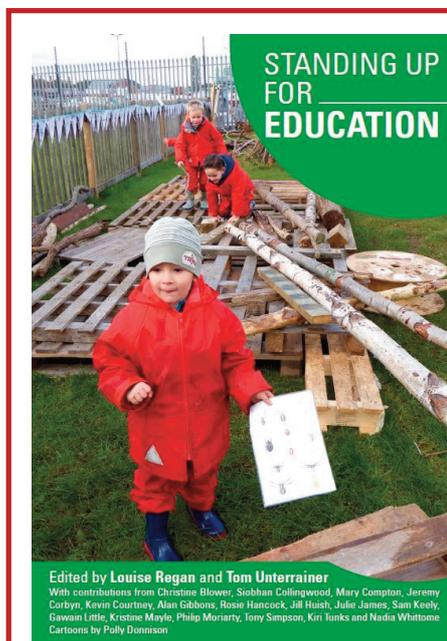
The most readily visible products of the crisis might point us in the right direction. The UK has very unhappy

students and equally unhappy educators. They're not simply 'disgruntled' but are being driven to despair.

In the case of students, Natasha Devon (page 21) points out that purportedly 'scientific' and 'rigorous' testing regimes damage mental health. What's true for young people is equally true for the people who teach them.

The extent to which educators have become mere appendages to spurious targets, data collection systems, 'accountability', 'performance management' thresholds and the rest has done serious damage. These dual pressures, acting 'upwards' and 'downwards', have generated a truly toxic culture.

No wonder then that there is a serious teacher recruitment crisis. The start of every school year is greeted by a plethora of media stories detailing the drop in numbers of those applying to teach and the ever-widening number of unfilled teaching



## Standing Up for Education

Edited by Louise Regan and Tom Unterrainer

*With contributions from Christine Blower, Siobhan Collingwood, Mary Compton, Jeremy Corbyn, Kevin Courtney, Alan Gibbons, Rosie Hancock, Jill Huish, Julie James, Sam Keely, Gawain Little, Kristine Mayle, Philip Moriarty, Tony Simpson, Kiri Tunks and Nadia Whittome.*

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## Transforming Schools and Education in the first one hundred days of a Labour government

posts. The figures for 2018 are particularly shocking.

Most seriously, in the short-term at least, is the crisis in school funding and the impact this will have on the educational prospects of millions of children and young people. After a period where schools went relatively unscathed in rounds of public sector spending cuts, austerity has finally hit home.

If the current government remains in power for any period of time, the impact of funding cuts will be significant: fewer teachers, larger class sizes, an even narrower curriculum and another generation of over-tested, under-nurtured young people.

The truly outrageous, but very instructive, fact is that when this government attempts to respond to the crisis of its' own making, it will deploy all the machinery that drove the crisis in the first place. For example: larger class sizes can only result in a drop in 'standards'. Data collection systems in schools across the land will be flashing red. When the Department for Education crunches numbers, the Whitehall computer system will go into the mother of all meltdowns.

Cue a public statement from the Secretary of State attacking schools and teachers. The statement will most likely include an assault on the 'youth of today'. Also included will be announcements of further powers for Ofsted, more focus on the 'basics', the need for 'higher standards' and more 'robust accountability' measures.

Far from ending the cycle of

toxicity, the response will simply make things worse: an even narrower curriculum, more punitive regimes and much greater pressure.

The next Labour government will not only have to deal with these symptoms of the crisis. It will have to deal with the causes. To do this, the faulty and failing logic of neoliberal 'reforms' need to be short-circuited. In their place, the creative impulses that drive educators and learners must be allowed to flourish : they must be given the freedom to explore, experiment and focus on the actual needs of learners, young and old.

In this way, schools and young people will become more than digits in a data processing system; fodder for the labour market; sites of inadequately exploited capital generation or the perennial political football.

Such a transformation of schooling and education is not only necessary, it will be overwhelmingly popular. Not only that, but in many instances huge amounts of money can be saved. There will be little resistance from trade unions if they are fully involved from the word go, there will be little opposition from the parents and carers of over-stressed and over-tested children and the most far-sighted of employers already recognise the need for a rounded, creative and exploration-focussed educational process. That's why so many of the wealthy opt for just this sort of education for their own children.

What might a Labour

government be able to achieve in the first one hundred days in power? Here are a few suggestions that might be included:

1. Scrap standardised testing.
2. Abolish league tables.
3. Abolish Ofsted
4. Put play at the centre of early years education.
5. Halt new academies and Free Schools and begin the process of re-nationalisation.
6. Remove curriculum restrictions, widen the choices offered to young people and scrap the greater - and ultimately damaging - weighting given to Maths, Science and English subjects.
7. Remove the punitive language of surveillance and control.
8. Remove barriers between 'academic', 'creative' and 'skills'/'vocational' subjects. Allow students to experience everything without limits.
9. Put teachers and young people at the centre of the curriculum formation process.
10. Remove the private sector and 'private sector priorities' from the education system.
11. Return teacher training to university departments and ensure that teachers are exposed to the full range of pedagogic ideas and approaches.

**From vision to reality...**

to public accountability and to a vision of education that goes beyond the exclusively academic. But, as SEA argued in its response to the party's consultation, there is much more to say. We argued that:

- Labour needs to challenge the narrow approach to education that has been promoted since 2010. Education should promote not just the acquisition of knowledge but the mastery of a wide range of skills and the development of personal qualities and values that will support our vision of the good society.
- A core purpose of the NES should be to promote greater equality and to enhance social cohesion. A comprehensive system in which children from all backgrounds learn together is of critical importance to these objectives.
- Competition and marketisation can have no place in a socialist education service and we need specific proposals to address this for all phases of education from early years through schools and colleges to

universities.

- Establishing a National Education Service should not be at the expense of the ability of local communities to influence the provision of education in their area. Neither the DfE nor Ofsted are fit for purpose and real devolution of decision making is essential.

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**'we need a new vision for what the aims and purposes of education are'**

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In 2010, Michael Gove walked into the Department for Education knowing exactly what he wanted to do. The first academies legislation was introduced within weeks because the work had been done in opposition.

In the current situation, a snap election cannot be ruled out given the chaos over Brexit. SEA believes that Labour needs to be as ready as Gove was to hit the ground running not just by 2022 but by 2019.

SEA is the Labour party's affiliated society specialising in

education. For the past two years, in meetings, conferences, blogs and in the pages of this journal, we have been exploring what a truly radical programme for government could look like. We believe that the party needs to be much more ambitious if we are to provide a National Education Service that can truly stand comparison with the National Health Service.

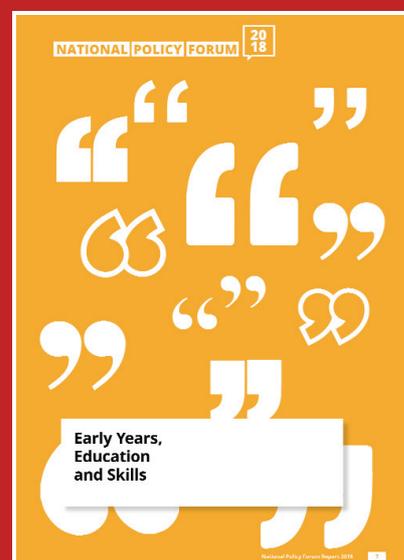
First of all, we need a new vision for what the aims and purposes of education are. This needs to be grounded in an understanding of the kind of world our young people will be growing up into. We need future generations that are informed and expert certainly, but also have the skills and values that will be needed in a fast changing world. This will require a new approach to the curriculum, to assessment and to the kinds of draconian disciplinary regimes operating in an increasing number of schools.

The school systems in the East that have been held up as role models to realising this. They are shifting the emphasis away from rote learning and increasing the emphasis on deep understanding,

## Early Years, Education and Skills

### National Policy Forum 2018 Report

The NPF Commission responsible for consultation on the *National Education Service* policy has produced a report of its findings. Combining information on the consultation process, including information on those involved, the report expands on some of the key themes outlined in the '*National Education Service Draft Charter*' and provides snapshot quotations from some of the submissions. Of particular interest is the quote from the National Education Union, which states: "[Education should] engage children and young people, enabling them to develop their interests and broaden their horizons, giving them the best life chances possible to participate fully in the life of the nation as equal citizens, modern, responsible and engaged, and as fully rounded, happy human beings, motivated to continue learning through their lives." This report makes a contribution to our collective efforts to forge education policies that meet the aspiration outlined by the NEU. However, there is still much work to do if we are to meet these aims. The full report will be available at Conference and can be viewed online at: <https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/commissions/education>



the ability to apply knowledge to solving new problems and the ability to think creatively. English education, dominated by the prejudices of a couple of politicians, is ignoring this and sticking to an out-dated model.

We need to be thinking too about the well-being of both students and staff. International surveys tell us that our children are amongst the most unhappy in the world. This is true also of many members of staff which is why teachers are leaving faster than they can be replaced. How schools and colleges are being run and the pressures being put on both students and staff are making significant contributions to this decline in well-being.

Next must be a serious challenge to the ideology of competition and marketisation that has been dominant across the education system for the last 30 years. It's important to assert clearly that structures matter – issues of governance and accountability are not mere details that we can largely ignore or hand over to technicians. They determine whether there is fair access to

opportunity for all, what the day to day experience of staff and students is like, how efficiently scarce resources are used and whether communities have a genuine stake in how their children are educated. Currently, we are doing badly on all these fronts and this needs to change. Education is a public good and should be delivered as a public service – but the rot has set in so far that changing this is complex, will be controversial but absolutely needs to be done.

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**'Next must be a serious challenge to the ideology of competition'**

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International evidence says clearly that the English system is not delivering for lower attainers and that outcomes are determined more than they should be by socio-economic background. Too much selection and segregation (academic, social and religious) both between and within schools is an important reason why. So too is a curriculum and exam system which is increasingly being

reduced to a narrow band of academic subjects at the expense of practical, technical and artistic ones.

The report of the Education Commission of the National Policy Forum recognises some of these issues. But there are virtually no answers on offer, which after three years of talking about the NES is a huge disappointment. It is concerning that the scale of the challenge is not really recognised. Overturning the dominant ideology that has driven education for too long is not easy and can't be done in the few weeks of a short election campaign. The case for change will need to be made over years not weeks.

That will mean, in months not years, developing a distinctive Labour vision for a National Education Service and producing comprehensive policies that can be ready for immediate implementation. This issue of Education Politics aims to use the expertise and commitment of SEA members to get us closer to that goal.

**The Socialist Educational Association**  
is the only educational organisation  
affiliated to the Labour Party  
and can be described as its  
**critical friend**



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[socialisteducationalassociation.org/category/events/](http://socialisteducationalassociation.org/category/events/)

# Abolish Academies and

**Richard Hatcher and David Pavett**

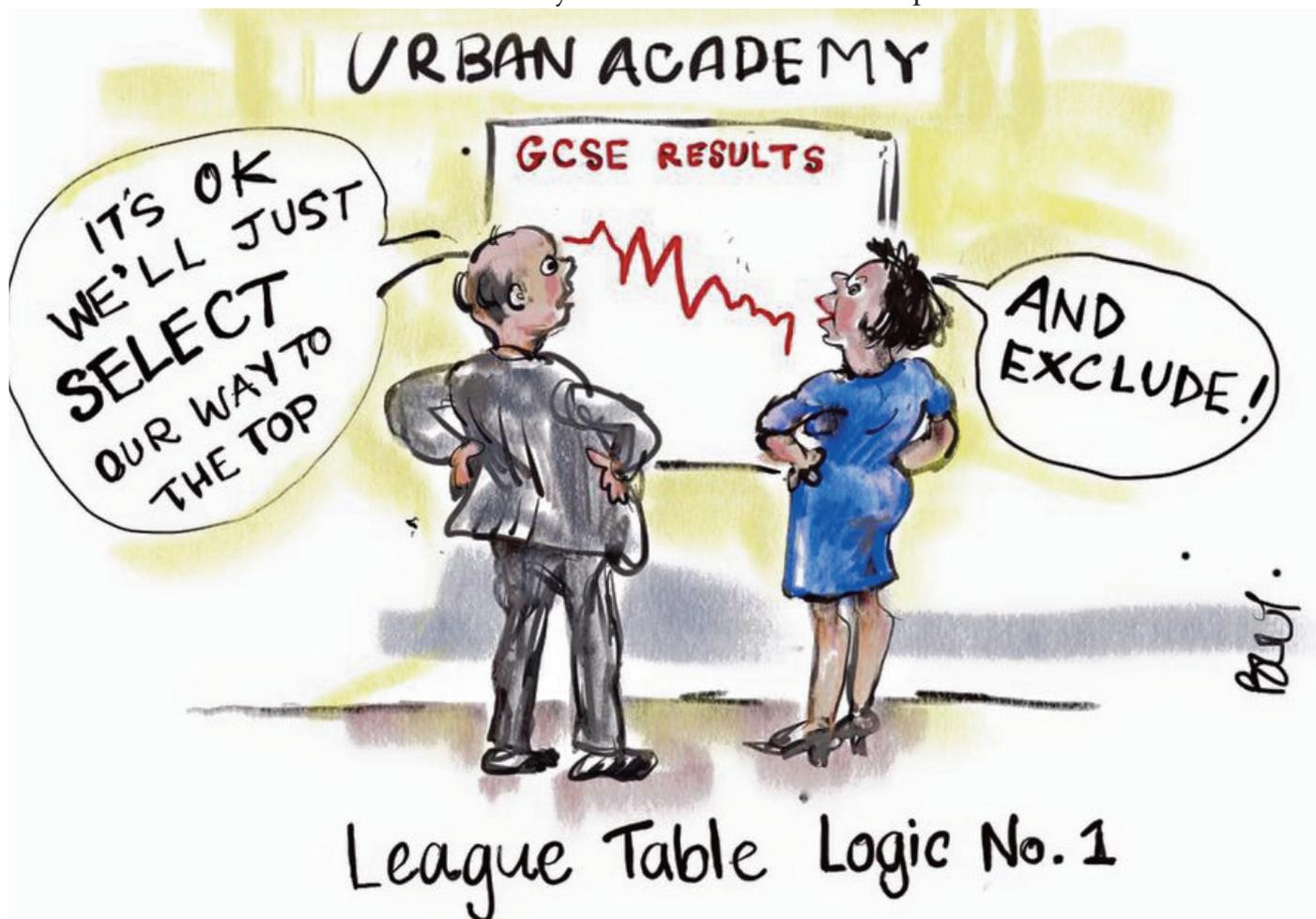
To rephrase John Dewey slightly, ‘What the best and wisest parents want for their own children, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.’ [1]

Only a community-wide system of schools can ensure a good school for every child and young person. So the question of standards is inseparable from the structure of the local school system, ensured by democratic accountability to local government. The old Blairite mantra of ‘standards not structures’ is a completely

mistaken counterposition, currently being revived in an attempt to block moves to abolish the twin structures that maintain the divisive Conservative state school system. One is the socially selective grammar schools which survive in too many local authorities and are currently expanding, perpetuating the old grammar-secondary modern division. The other divisive structure, far more pervasive, is academies (including so-called free schools): schools unaccountable to local communities through the oversight of elected local authorities and often controlled by private organisations under government contracts – the academy chains.

**A Labour government can abolish academies**

Labour’s National Education Service has established the principle of a local democratically accountable school system. It now needs filling out and strengthening to include the abolition of grammar schools and academies, in line with the policies of Jeremy Corbyn. He is a longtime advocate of a fully comprehensive school system and, as Labour leadership candidate in 2015, said ‘I am not a supporter of the principle of free schools and academies, and I would want to bring them all back into the local authority orbit.’ (Guardian 7 July 2015). In a speech to Labour councillors in



# Grammar Schools

Nottingham on 3 February this year, speaking against the privatisation of public services, he said:

*“it’s about time we acknowledged a truth we all know - when it comes to running public services it’s the public sector that works best, that delivers for the many, not the few, accountable to the public and acting in the public interest.”*

Now we have the real possibility of a Labour government which would end selection and abolish the status of academies, restoring control of schools to their elected governing bodies and creating a universal state-funded system accountable to reinvigorated and reformed elected local authorities. Ending selection is relatively straightforward through legislation that phases it out with each new annual entry cohort. What would Labour need to do to abolish academies?

A Labour secretary of state has the power, based on precedents set by Michael Gove when he unilaterally altered existing funding agreements, to terminate the funding agreements of academies and transfer the schools, their land and premises to their relevant local authorities. A Labour secretary of state can also introduce legislation to remove all powers over the governance of schools by academy trusts including academy chains and MATs (Multi-Academy Trusts), and restore the control of state-funded schools to their duly constituted governing bodies, which would include a majority of

elected representatives of parents, staff and the local community.

Many schools collaborate together, including as MATS, and Labour should encourage schools to work together, including the option of forming partnerships, provided that ultimate control remains with individual schools’ governing bodies. Schools are of course free to purchase the provision of support from any external organisation and that should include ex-academy trusts if they continue to offer it.

## **For a reinvigorated and democratised local authority system**

Academies would be integrated – in most cases reintegrated - into a reinvigorated local authority system. This would need to be a carefully managed phased process ensuring that there was as little disruption to the schools as possible and that local authorities had the capacity to fulfil their additional responsibilities, which would require a reversal of the massive cuts in local authority budgets.

The functions of the local authority would include, as now, monitoring schools, providing appropriate support to schools, parents, children and young people, and connecting the local school system to other relevant agencies and sectors. (It may be advantageous for smaller local authorities to collaborate together to provide some of these functions.) Concerns about the professional capacities of the newly reformed local authorities

could be alleviated by a policy of rotating secondments to them by local headteachers and teachers.

But the concept of democratic accountability of the local authority for its local school system means more than this, and here we draw on the powerful case made by Michael Fielding and Peter Moss in their 2011 book *Radical Education and the Common School: a democratic alternative* [2]. They propose that the local authority ‘should have responsibility for the education of its children, indeed more broadly for the relationship between its children and the community. This does not mean going back to a situation where local authorities manage schools directly. Schools should be democratically managed in a system of governance marked by decentralisation and widespread participation, by children and adults, teachers and parents, school and local communities.’ (p123). On that basis ‘local authorities define a local cultural project of education for their community, a collective vision for the area, in relationship with schools, local communities and citizens...’. (p124).

The fundamental principle here is that every citizen has a stake in, and therefore should have a voice in, the vision, principles and aims of their local school system. What sort of structures and processes of local governance could make that possible? At present local authorities provide little opportunity for public involvement in the policy process. The structures and procedures of

local councils are highly bureaucratic and exclusionary. It is representative democracy without participatory democracy. Fielding and Moss say that ‘in today’s neoliberal climate, ‘accountability’ is widely understood in a predominantly contractual and legal sense as ‘a largely negative instrument of political and social control’ (p123), which is why ‘the development of radical education and the common school needs to go hand-in-hand with the renewal and development of democratic local government, which in our view has to include an active and innovative role in education.’ (p127).

This entails a radical redefinition of the concept of ‘accountability’. In her book *Reclaiming Local Democracy* Ines Newman points out that ‘Unlike ‘democracy’, ‘accountability’ separates out the state and society and can be exercised with no participation by citizens in the decision-making

process.’ (p103). [3] ‘The concept of democracy demands the active involvement of diverse citizens in determining policy. It also demands institutions that address the current power inequalities that allow elites to dominate the policymaking process. It therefore involves both representative and participative democracy...’ (p104). ‘If democracy is to be reclaimed, councillors will need to address power inequalities and to increase the capacity of individuals or groups to engage in the policy process.’ (p101).

### **Democratic participation through Local Education Forums**

What institutional form could make it possible for all stakeholders in the local education system to participate? What is needed is a Local Education Forum: a body in each local authority area meeting regularly which brings together all with an interest in education,

including of course teachers and other school workers, school governors, parents and school students, as well as councillors and other education-related bodies. The details of each Local Education Forum’s constitution and procedures should be a matter for local decision.

Public participation in local education policy-making does not mean intervening in issues which are properly matters of professional judgement. Nor does it imply that public views are inevitably progressive. In both cases it is a question of deliberation and negotiation among public and professionals, and the mobilisation of collective popular and professional support for progressive policies.

But community-wide public and professional participation is fruitless unless there is a means to feed it into and influence council policy. There would need to be formal procedures to channel the deliberations of the Local Education Forum into the

## **Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture 2018**

This year's Caroline Benn Lecture will be delivered by Professor Stephen Gorard from Durham University. Stephen is probably the leading academic specialist on all the issues around school choice, selection and its impact on both schools and on young people themselves. His research is absolutely key to understanding how inequality bedevils our school system. Anyone concerned with these issues will need to hear Stephen's latest views on school intakes and their impact on social cohesion.



**Date and Time**

Tue, November 13, 2018, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

**Location**

House of Commons Committee Room 14

Tickets: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/caroline-benn-memorial-lecture-2018-tickets-49686806576>

Council's decision-making process. The Labour Party has yet to address the need for radical reform to democratise the existing structures and processes of local government, based on a new combination of representative and participatory democracy. But there is an initial step which local councils have the power to take right now: open up the scrutiny committee responsible for education to lay members elected from the Local Education Forum with at least an advisory role. (There is a precedent: they already have religious representatives.)

**Open up a debate to translate the NES into concrete policies**

The question of academies is of course just one of the educational issues facing a future Labour government. The NES statement provides an initial brief starting-point, but it urgently needs filling-out and strengthening. Labour now needs to open up a debate to translate the NES into concrete policies. Labour should:

a) consult with its members, and affiliates active on educational issues, about what broad areas of policy the Party needs to work on. It should also

take note of the materials and suggestions of the various groups campaigning for more inclusive state education;

b) draw up a list of the ideas resulting from (a) and make tentative suggestions about whether it thinks they should be pursued or not, which issues require urgent answers and which require a longer term perspective;

c) consult widely on the ideas resulting from (b) with a view to organising a series of carefully prepared seminars with papers arguing for various perspectives and solutions circulated in advance of the discussions;

d) maintain a website giving full information about all of the above so as to work in the most transparent way possible.

e) The purpose of all of the above should be clear: to develop Labour's understanding of educational issues and to develop its proposals with a view to reaching out to the electorate with its solutions and asking for feedback from everyone interested.

All of this should be the basis for

a hard-hitting campaign to win public support for a new settlement for education. All of this would require careful planning and a genuine commitment to following where the arguments lead rather than deciding in advance what the results should be. Labour has no established tradition of working in this way so a lot of effort would be required to get it to do so. Labour has within its ranks the people who could see such a project through to success. Now it needs to show that its commitment to member involvement in policy formation is more than just rhetoric.

The SEA should play a key role in this process, including by organising a series of local public meetings throughout the country, in conjunction with other organisations where appropriate.

**Notes**

1. John Dewey (1907) 'The School and Social Progress.' Chapter 1 of *The School and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (p19).
2. Michael Fielding and Peter Moss (2011) *Radical Education and the Common School: a democratic alternative*. Abingdon: Routledge.
3. Ines Newman (2014) *Reclaiming Local Democracy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

This article draws on Richard's article 'The realistic possibility of a Labour government led by Jeremy Corbyn means we could get rid of academies for good', published in the current issue of *FORUM: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education* 60:2, July 2018, pp201-216. This is the link to the journal: [www.worlds.co.uk/forum/content/pdfs/60/issue60\\_2.asp](http://www.worlds.co.uk/forum/content/pdfs/60/issue60_2.asp)



# For Socialism and Education

Kevin Courtney

It is thirty years since Margaret Thatcher's *Education Reform Act* established the framework of a new school system in England. No government since then has tried to step outside its framework.

The patterns of our everyday work, and the horizons of our imagination, are to a large extent set by '1988'. It is difficult to imagine a system of accountability without Ofsted, of assessment without SATs, of school governance without academies.

Yet this is what Labour now has to do. With the promise of a National Education Service, Labour has set itself a bold challenge – to remake, root and branch, a broken system.

To some such a bold change can seem intimidating. But the evidence of failure of the current system is everywhere, in and around the school. Our children are the most unhappy in the developed world, their teachers face higher workload than practical anywhere else. We have growing problems of cuts and a teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Our market-led school system puts finances before the well-being of pupils; our tests and

exams narrow the curriculum while increasing stress; special needs education is in crisis; our inspection system punishes more than it supports; our failing accountability systems contribute to a school culture where management is intrusive and workload ever-rising.

These are not accidental failures. They are the products of austerity, and of an educational programme based on the core principles of neoliberalism – a marketised system, policed by a strong state. They are problems not just of resources but of quality. We have to accept that smaller changes are likely to fail – we can't introduce teacher assessment alongside SATs or school self-evaluation alongside Ofsted. We need a change on the scale of the 1944 Education Act to put right the failures of the 1988 Act. They cannot be ended without investment, and without a bold redesign. Here the Party proposals have some way to go. The NES will need to be based on concrete proposals, as well as good intentions.

Many supporters of the NES will feel that progress needs to be quicker if the conversation on education is to be changed, and a

new sense of possibility created. We know the problems are many and complex. We know that socialism is the language of priorities and that we must select and target our policies. We have to know where to begin, in a way that maximises support, and sets out a clear path towards further change. In that spirit, I put forward these proposals.

- Restore the cuts made by Coalition and Conservative governments; then build a new school budget formula that guarantees schools have the resources they need. Invest massively in early years, SEND and further education.
- Commit to ending the current system of testing in primary schools in its entirety – baseline, phonics and SATs. In that context introduce the better systems of assessment for learning that we see in other countries.
- Abolish the EACC so that schools are not discouraged from teaching arts and vocational subjects.
- Take bold first steps to re-



Kevin Courtney is joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, the largest teachers' organisation in Europe. Formed in 2017 following the merger of the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the National Education Union (NEU) represents over half a million teachers, FE lecturers, school support staff and teaching assistants. The NEU proclaims that *"together we'll shape the future of education"*. For more information on the NEU, visit their website at [neu.org.uk](http://neu.org.uk).

integrating all schools into a unified, democratically accountable system; including by immediately reintroducing national pay and conditions and Local Authority oversight of school admissions and exclusions, by allowing Local Authorities to open new community schools and returning to them pupil place planning powers, ending forced academisation and by returning a legal existence to schools in MATs with the right to leave those MATs and by making the remaining trust boards bodies into elected bodies. Local authorities school support systems should simultaneously be systematically rebuilt.

- Abolish Ofsted school inspection and create a school review system based on self and peer review, quality assured by HMI. Other countries do this and it works.

- Support the work of teachers and the growth of professionalism; base systems of management on professional dialogue and trust in teachers reducing the onerous demands for evidence so it only required where there is suspected failure. Invest hugely in better initial training supported by university education departments and in high quality Continuing Professional Development.

With policy headlines like these, Labour can take the 'standards agenda' away from the right. It can depict Conservatism for what it really is: the party that promotes low quality, test-dominated, de-professionalised, underfunded education for the many, while reserving opportunity for the few.

# Ready for work? Some questions

Tom Unterrainer



## Ready for what type of work and workplace?

Something instructive is happening in American schools. To clarify, it's not the hyper-commercialisation, continued segregation, conformity and narrowing of curriculum in that country's state-funded schools that is of interest. No, the interesting development is the proliferation of fee-paying schools that fundamentally reject the narrow view of childhood that generally dictates in education. Also of interest is the fact that such schools are overwhelmingly popular with sections of the elite in American society.

Only the rich can afford to send their children to such places, schools where budget cuts, competition, assessments, league tables and a narrowing curriculum are unimaginable. These are places where young people blossom in their own ways, where children are cultivated as 'fully developed human beings fit for a variety of labours'. Such places are the preserve of the already privileged. Why so? Why is such an education fit only for a small section of society, people who could choose any school in the world but who prefer – in increasing numbers – a progressive alternative? Because when you can buy the best education available on the planet, you buy it.

We should be very cautious indeed when using the phrases "ready for work" or "work ready" when discussing educational priorities.

Parents, children and educators in the UK are told that high-stakes testing, league tables, invasive inspection and appraisal regimes are the only way to secure the best possible outcomes for young people. A philosophy of 'train it, measure it, race it' dominates, where children and young people are trapped in a perpetual horse race, where every day is like the Grand National. The children of working class families and others are being sold an educational bill of goods that would horrify not only the elites of New York but ordinary families on much of the European continent.

Ken Coates argued the following in the 1970s:

*continued on page 12...*

## Education Politics

*'It remains true that the liberal educational goals are, at root, in flagrant contradiction to the basic assumptions which regulate our economic life. The result is that today, far from education – individual development in co-operative activity – reaching out through working life to become a life-long experience, it is still true that industry constantly exerts itself to reach its clammy hands down into schools, in order to make wage-slavery as life-long, and as inescapable, as it possibly can.'*

Ken was concerned to identify and celebrate the very many positive and progressive developments in education at the time. For example, the raising of the school leaving age and the 'new spirit in the schools' where '[t]he primary school today ... is a place of adventure, experiment, liveliness, joy, and a felicitous co-operation between child, parent and teacher'. But he was also finely tuned into the realities of employment at the time and the contradictions between developments in education and the practicalities of the workplace: '[t]he more co-operative and participatory that teaching techniques become, the more grossly they will be out of phase with the roles for which their victims are being prepared'.

The development of 'Academies and 'Free Schools', the high-stakes testing regime and the general narrowing of the curriculum can be understood as an effort to resolve the contradiction identified by Coates. In short, there is now little effort made to maintain the pretence that schools are places of liberation, wonderment and joy. The steady progress towards the privatisation of schools and the further regimentations of the curriculum are answers to the oft-posed question: 'what sort of education does modern production require?' In large parts of the world, the 'Global Education Reform Movement' [GERM] is working to provide similar answers to this question. Our children are victims of a global process that only the wealthy elites are able to escape. This is because when we talk of 'modern production' we are talking about the practices of multi-national companies, firms that operate within a global market with global competition and global imperatives. We are talking about zero-hours contracts, anti-union laws, employment practices geared towards avoiding payment of the minimum or living wage. We are talking about short-termism, precariousness and uncertainty. When asked to answer the question 'what sort of education does modern production require?', the present government are fully aware of the realities and imperatives.

Coates suggested that we turn the question on its head. Rather than moulding a school and education system to the needs and requirements of modern production and employment – with its litany of inadequacies, humiliations and repressions – we should ask what modern production and employment can learn from the aspirations of progressive education. Should we not try to understand that when the economic elites of New York and elsewhere shun 'traditional education' and choose the best education that money can buy, they do so not just because they love their children but because they understand that such an education will prepare them for the demands and challenges of the world to come?

The present government has offered its answer to the question of what type of schools we need. In so doing, they have generated an unprecedented crisis and our first job is to make them accountable for it. Our second job is to reject the premise of the question they sought to answer. Our third job is to fight for a vision and structure of education and society more generally where the extraordinary in each of us can be unleashed.

# Abolish



In September 2017, the New Zealand Labour Party returned to government for the first time since 2008. Despite governing through a mixture of coalition and confidence-and-supply arrangements, Labour in New Zealand has been able to implement some important education reforms. The most striking of these is the abolition of national standards. Labour in NZ listened to the concerns of teacher unions, parents and children themselves in deciding to scrap the National Standards. Labour in the UK now has a very clear understanding of the impact of neoliberalism on our economy and society - including our public services. Standardised testing is just as much a product of neoliberal thought in the UK as it was in NZ. Surely it's time to follow the lead of our sister party?

# National Standards

## Lessons from New Zealand

The National Party of New Zealand under Prime Minister John Key introduced a policy of National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics for primary-aged students when it became the government in 2008.

Draft standards were released for consultation in May 2009 and the standards were introduced at the beginning of the 2010 school year.

NZEI Te Riu Roa (the union for primary principals and teachers, support staff, early childhood workers and Ministry of Education itinerant staff) fiercely fought National Standards and lobbied opposition parties to commit to getting rid of National Standards should they become government. One of the first acts of the new Labour-led coalition government was to scrap National Standards in early 2018.

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**‘It was important to change the narrative about how National Standards narrowed the curriculum’**

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NZEI Te Riu Roa President Lynda Stuart said in December 2017 after their demise was announced by the new government:

*“National Standards narrowed the curriculum, put undue pressure on children, increased teacher workload and weren’t even an accurate measure of a child’s progress.”*

It was important to change the narrative about how National Standards narrowed the curriculum.

There was a need to combat the neo-liberal agenda that National Standards were a panacea for all “the ills” in the New Zealand education system. Focussing on the was particularly effective. Parents were good allies in this, as they did not like their child being assessed “below standard” and were unhappy that progress was not being measured in an individualised. Children became unconfident of their abilities, with some as young as five years old saying they were failures.

Children with additional learning needs were also included in the National Standards statistics. Schools were told to report these results to the ministry, but not to parents. This also caused parents to be disillusioned about the results’ worth and effectiveness.

We explained that teachers do test in NZ using a range of assessment tools but these are assessments for learning rather than of learning. This was integral in allaying fears particularly of parents who wanted to know how their child was doing at school.

The National government had said the standards were needed to help those children who were “under-achieving”, but it was painfully clear that there was no extra funding forthcoming for children who had been identified as needing extra support.

By changing words and phrases, we were able to move the conversation. We talked about children and their learning, a narrowing curriculum, creativity being stifled, high-stakes testing, pitting schools against each other and the danger of perceived “failing” schools. We talked about how every school was a good school and that with adequate funding all children could reach their potential. That quality public education was real and achievable.

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**‘We called out the neo-liberal agenda behind National Standards’**

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We “called out” what we thought were the real reason behind National Standards – that they were part of the neo-liberal agenda. School education in New Zealand had been “neoliberalised” over the past 30 years, and this shaped these three policies.

A lot of work was done around how broad, creative curricula were the best way for children to learn and become resilient, questioning and confident citizens. We generated a lot of stories around the benefit of arts, music in schools, for example.

It was enough to create doubt in the minds of the public and influence commentators and allies.

*This article was adapted from a document produced by NZEI.*

# A passion for learning

Excerpt: **Life Lessons** by Melissa Benn, Verso, 2018

Trawl the literature on the 'fourth industrial revolution' and the same themes repeatedly recur. We are facing the end of the job for life, the rise of the freelance, task-oriented, gig economy. In order to get ahead or even just to survive, tomorrow's workers will have to be entrepreneurial, good communicators, globally aware, thrive in solo work – 'learning to earn a living through the "start up of you" –

and skilled in teams.

According to Hilary Cottam we can 'expect an average of eleven jobs in a lifetime ... and by 2020 half of Britons will be sole traders. Automation will rob us of millions of jobs. Manufacturing is already shifting from the factory floor to the 3D printer; coding is actually the principal foreign language of our age. Chatbots will staff call centres, but will still require human administrators and

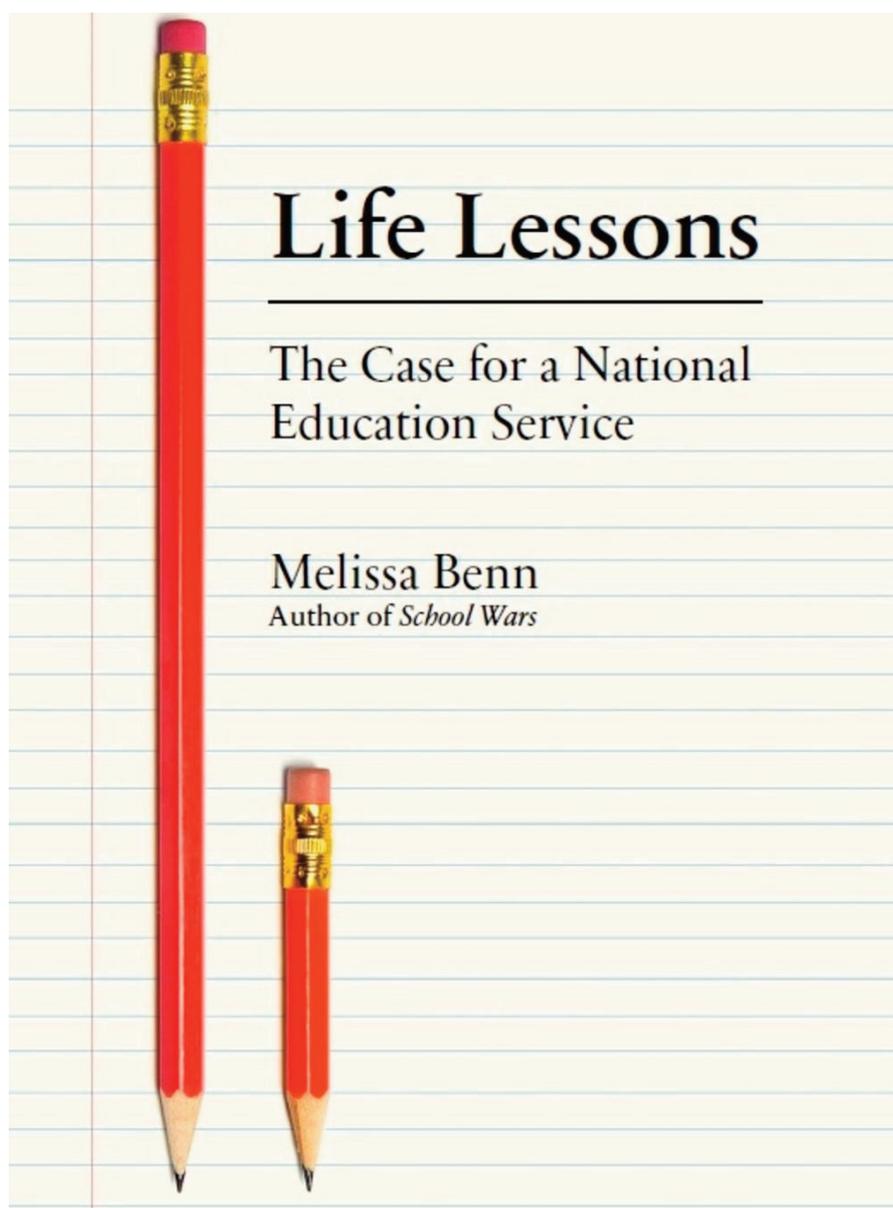
supervisors, a lonely sounding sort of job. Nano robots will enter *through* the keyhole in order to get the surgical job done.

Artificial Intelligence will soon successfully be able to reproduce all the great works of art, while driverless cars will render thousands unemployed within a decade (although I anticipate a flourishing underground business in old-fashioned taxis, driven by surly well-informed drivers, to continue long into the twenty-first century).

Yet what most clearly emerges from this extensive literature is how much more, not less, relevant and cherished the ungovernable human being, and human relations, will become in this futuristic landscape.

As jobs move away from manufacturing to services, there will be more demand for stronger non-cognitive skills such as communication, confidence and resilience.

How will – how *should* – these economic and technological changes affect twenty-first-century schooling? Proposals for a 'twenty-first-century curriculum' tend to put emphasis on increasing student understanding of global politics, climate change, and interpersonal relationships and fostering greater self-



development and civic engagement. Such goals, unimpeachable as they are, can have a touch of non-specific windiness about them and a hint of the wrong sort of vaulting ambition as if we are setting young people the challenge to solve major problems – global warming, the fraying of democracy – that have eluded the efforts of most adults so far. Perhaps we also fear the vanishing of academic specialisms – the foundation stone of English education – into a general haze of good intentions.

Returning from the wilder shores of utopian speculation to the unforgiving playground of contemporary political debate, it feels hard to know how to fit the vague future into the demanding present moment in which children must be educated daily, exams taken, specific paths in life decided. There lurks a more pragmatic fear of losing important elements of the modern scene such as an apparently new emphasis on high expectations and order in our classrooms. All schools may not yet have reached these giddy heights but such themes are understandably important to parents, and politicians are always sensitive to the anxieties of their electorate.

This nervous pragmatism may have its uses, however. In our consideration of the future we need to incorporate the right lessons from the past in the right

way, to remember that our system has for too long and too often failed to provide a genuinely interesting and challenging education for most children and certainly a significant majority of disadvantaged young people.

Many of the wrong turns of the past seventy years (including grammar schools, retro traditionalism and the market experiment) have stemmed, in part, from attempts, however partial, however blinkered, to rescue some, or all, from underachievement and a lack of self-fulfillment. They may have produced their own problems, but nonetheless future deliberations on curriculum, pedagogy and discipline – in the broadest sense – must stay faithful to the better part of those goals and carry forward the most fruitful lessons of the past.

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**‘It is important not to underestimate any single learner or group of learners’**

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It is important not to underestimate any single learner or group of learners and maintain the highest expectations of all children, albeit in broader ways than currently conceived. We must take particular care to invest, in all senses, in the education of the disadvantaged and make sure that schools are seen as places where we learn how to live together in interesting harmony. Last but not least, the daily

experience of education must be shot through with friendly, engaged order. We could call this approach both progressive and rigorous.

What might such a perspective look like in practice? At the heart of all these initiatives must be a renewed emphasis on the importance of nurturing relationships and capabilities of all kinds: an imperative perfectly in keeping both with the anticipated demands of Artificial Intelligence and some interesting contemporary ideas on the principles behind the revitalisation of the welfare state.’

At an early years level, there needs to be a switch away from didactic, fact-based learning to the play-based curriculum that has been well established, by numerous researchers, as the best foundation for deep understanding, one that recognises the vital emotional and relational elements of learning.

Our system’s current overemphasis on testing needs to be phased out in favour of different forms of formative rather than summative assessment, with teachers constantly ‘feeding back’ responses to students, and resources directed to support struggling learners to achieve their very best.

At secondary level, there should be no contradiction between deep subject learning and more engaging methods of

teaching. As I have argued, for many teachers the traditional /progressive divide is pernicious: a false binary.

This is not just abstract theory. There are schools around the country, often led by brave heads, that have deliberately pursued their own pedagogical path. What most struck me about the schools I visited was their rigour. They mix something of today's 'high expectations' culture with older ideas about granting young people the time, and freedom, to learn more deeply. It is also significant that they are in areas of high deprivation or surrounded by more selective institutions, meaning a significant proportion of Year 7 pupils will arrive with a sense of demoralisation about having failed to get into a 'better' school: the curse of the English system.

Yet I was deeply impressed by the degree of commitment, and self-critical reflection, displayed by heads, teachers and teaching assistants. There was plenty of what might be called traditional learning going on in both schools, but the whole point of Slow Education, or the approach taken at Stanley Park High, is not to spurn knowledge but to anchor it

more authentically. Luckily, its impact can be assessed in terms of data and destination as well as in the manifest enjoyment of students.

So, what are some of the policy implications of such a shift in approach to teaching and learning? Education is inevitably a deeply political question, but that does not mean politicians should directly decide what children learn.

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**'Without doubt, the setting of the national curriculum should not just be removed from politicians of all parties, but separated from the distorting nature of the political cycle.'**

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Without doubt, the setting of the national curriculum should not just be removed from politicians, of all parties, but separated from the distorting nature of the political cycle itself. Nor is there a need for such a curriculum to set out in suffocating detail what knowledge needs to be acquired year by year.

At both primary and secondary level, the curriculum should be broad and multidisciplinary and, at secondary school, should

involve not just a spread of expected academic subjects but ensure plentiful provision of the arts, drama, music, physical exercise, consideration of political and social questions, sex and relationship education: all those elements that the futurologists (and our own common sense) tell us is so important.

Every child should have the right to learn a musical instrument and a foreign language, personal project and other non-exam-related forms of learning such as community service. In order to make the right decisions about their upper secondary school choices, future learning paths and eventual employment, students - will have access to properly funded guidance and careers advice.

These diverse initiatives offer both a coherent and contemporary framework that meets the challenges of the future and a truly national system. They can be utilised by any school in the country, whatever its mix, and balance of learners. The proposals also foster useful co-operation between schools and colleges in any given area.

*Edited extract from Chapter 8*

## THE ABOLITION OF CHILDHOOD?

As with our factory model, the state of the component or "Human operating unit" at this final inspection stage is linked in the development process to the initial raw material state, our childhood. Just as raw material in conventional production has to be monitored, tested and scientifically prepared for its ultimate destination so also must human material be scientifically prepared as society moves towards its factory model. In this regard, childhood in the sense in which I will describe it, is a real problem indeed. It is notoriously unscientific, is unstructured, is supervised by amateurs and non professionals, namely parents, and by definition the activists are the children themselves. For the reductionist bent on scientific principle and engineering precision, this is clearly a recipe for chaos and an unmitigated disaster. Above all, childhood is a subversive hotbed for the spread of tacit knowledge. This is a term coined by Polanyi to describe that form of knowledge which as he put it, is "those things we know but cannot tell".

Mike Cooley, *Delinquent Genius*

# Lifelong Learning - A personal view

Sal Morawetz

I've been active as a trade unionist mobilising around personal and professional development for workers for over three decades. It is music to my ears that the Party is committing to lifelong learning free at the point of use for all ages. We need more detailed discussion – perhaps via the Lifelong Learning Commission – and to set out some thoughts.

Where is the urgency for gearing up to the Fourth Industrial Revolution - Automation and Artificial Intelligence? The pundits envisage the decimation of countless low-skilled and low-paid jobs.

## **'Where is the urgency for gearing up for the Fourth Industrial Revolution?'**

We may see a myriad of new jobs developing over the next few decades, but where is the commitment to the needs of those likely to be most affected but least able to easily retrain in the short-to medium-term? Fantastic that funding for Unionlearn is to be restored – though I would warn against a self-perpetuating industry of well-paid project workers who organise ever more events regardless of growing release problems which make it increasingly hard for reps to function let alone attend external events alongside fantastic converts who've changed their lives through education and want to pay it forward. The most recent adult education survey reminds us that it is those living in areas of deprivation who are least likely to

be learning – a factor reinforced all too often by class, previous negative experiences of education, disability etc. I remember as a learning project worker being moved to the core by one woman who I'd helped sign up for an USDAW-led IT course crying tears of terror and nearly breaking every bone of my hand as I tried to reassure her and encourage her to go into the training room. She did just fine! We need plans to support unions & community activists to engage with such "at risk" workers to help them to take first steps into education and new skills. We should make it a legal right for unions or independent community learning champions to be able to access workers in companies without trade union

recognition to offer learning & education support!

Remember that often it's only through time and resource-heavy supported informal learning that such previous education "rejects" will see learning and training as an option for them. And for those who don't have the capacity to re-

train for this brave new world – we must ensure a supportive benefits culture as well as resourced opportunities to spread their wings learning about the things that thrill them in their personal lives!

I am delighted by our commitment to abolish higher education fees, bring back the Educational Maintenance Allowance and maintenance grants. But we can do better. If education and qualification training is to be truly about all ages, then we must also address the issue of support at the workplace. Currently employees in firms with over 250 workers have the right to request unpaid release to study related to their job



From the "Plebs," the monthly magazine of the National Council of Labour Colleges, 15 South Hill Park Gardens, London, N.W.3

– surely an employer responsibility anyway! I doubt many have accessed this, and indeed very few can afford to take time off without pay! (And the research shows that it is the already educated, higher social strata who are most likely to keep studying)

Let's go bold and make it a legal right for people to have a specified amount of paid time per annum to study for their own interests, making sure that employers can't use this to get employees to train in their time for current or employer supported future job competences!

We really need to get on with the discussions about cross border working! Forget Europe for a moment, we already see a bewildering mish-mash of different skills options available for workers and organisations with multiple sites located across different nations of the UK. Not to mention the iniquities of levy allocation to the devolved Nation States – can we ensure we'll be looking at that too? Let's see some sensible joined up thinking!

Previous Tory governments have decimated our brilliant careers service, so it is great to see our commitment to improve careers advice. Let's ensure that some of the ridiculous restricted vision, payment by results, output monitoring is done away with and introduce an all age, free, properly resourced, locally offered, face-to-face service (alongside something like Scotland's excellent web based World of Work resources) so that workers and unemployed alike can get expert support and guidance for re-training –

preferably without the stereotypes and unconscious bias that we so sadly see dominant in signposting currently!

Fanfare re our commitment to proper apprenticeships! I hope that means we will actually return to quality programmes. Too many British apprenticeships are the joke of Europe.

Instead of offering the breadth of competencies & knowledge that formats in other countries demand, the Tories cuddled up to business cronies and allowed them to set the terms of reference for narrower frameworks to suit parochial business needs rather than the proper fully transferable skills for the workforce of the future.

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### **'Too many British apprenticeships are the joke of Europe'**

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We have to challenge the bizarre new orthodoxy that profit focused businesses are all altruistically interested in and supportive of wider (cross) sector skills development!

And great that we will upskill trainers in the private sector (many of whom were "let go" in the first place from the ever-centralising Further Education colleges) but are we prepared to deal with the extremely dodgy sign offs for private providers to practice and sort the mess of insufficient, low quality assessor organisations?

First steps:

- Mandatory requirement for multiple trade union places at apprenticeship and skills decision-making tables – allowing all the appropriate

education and sector knowledgeable unions to be involved at every level, including the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and compulsory local quality and scrutiny panels in each employer with apprentices

- The right for paid time for apprentices to meet with union rep buddies.

Let us prioritise reviewing apprenticeships using international best practice to guide us, alongside exploring options for widening the levy of all employers to support a more helpful umbrella framework of different workforce development options, including apprenticeships, but for heaven's sake let us not rush into a further major upheaval at short notice!

And on the same vein ... Great that we will look at devolving responsibility for skills down to city regions or devolved administrations for local conditions. But we need both to retain more than annual report backs nationally and divorce ourselves from the 'party of business' which granted employers the powers to set the agenda.

Our Party must be saying loud and clear that it is the real education experts, together with the wider unions, the voluntary sector (particularly women, BAME and disability groups) and learners, who must have equal weight with employers to explore labour market intelligence and agree priorities and strategies!



Each of these issues is exceptionally important in and of itself and needs to be fixed under a Labour National Education Service, but each point to an underlying issue. That issue is accountability. If we can fix accountability, then we can fix nearly everything else in the education system. But we need to be brave and we need to be radical and we need to be prepared for a backlash from some of the traditional establishment.

By fixing accountability, you can have a system that accurately measures where problems truly lie in schools and where money can be provided to help remedy those problems. This accountability should be provided at a local enough level to allow communities the proper oversight they need to teach their children the skills that will help them flourish in their local economies and communities.

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**‘By fixing accountability you can put the power back into the hands of those at a local level’**

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By fixing accountability, you can put the power back into the hands of those at a local level - the parents, communities, and dare I say it, even the teachers - to produce an environment that is right for learning and engaging children with their education.

And by fixing accountability and the high stakes environment you will remove the additional, largely pointless workload that comes from having to ‘evidence’ everything in Ofsted’s name. This would bring the amount of work a teacher is required to do down to a level that is more manageable, while taking nothing whatsoever away from the children who are reliant upon that teacher for their education.

So what will that accountability

look like? Here, we must turn to our principles as socialists and those embodied by the SEA. As an organisation, we as SEA members have committed ourselves to promoting an education system that is local and democratic. These are the principles that we should follow too when designing our accountability system.

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**‘We need to start at the end result we want and work our way backwards’**

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If we just accept that the current results-based league tables are a way to measure ‘good’ schools, then our only offering will be to tinker at the edges of the accountability system we already have. I do not accept that baseline is a fairer way to judge schools because I do not accept that taking two measurements and rewarding schools with a biggest gap between these measurements is any way to determine if those children have received a good education.

We need to start at the end result we want to achieve and work our way backwards. Surely, we all want engaged, educated, contented, tolerant and active citizens who can work effectively together. The question is, how do we design an education system that achieves this? We need to be bold and ask ourselves difficult questions like, does our assessment system help or hinder us producing citizens who know how to work together and who are content with few mental health problems? If it doesn’t then we need changes.

As an MP I care about all the children in my constituency and I want all the children to have a good quality education. I believe that the current system is driving behaviours that prevent this happening universally. The

practise of ‘off rolling’ is well evidenced in the latest education select committee report and is arguably the ‘unintended consequence’ of a system that rewards schools who can get the more troublesome students out of their results. Imagine the radical change that could immediately appear if we decided that we would no longer judge schools individually on their results, but we would instead judge them collectively through regional accountability.

Regional accountability could end ‘off rolling’ overnight because every school would become responsible for every child. For that region to demonstrate achievement for the pupils they would be forced to collaborate, recognise their different strengths and weaknesses, share expertise and work together. We know that collaboration works, London Challenge demonstrated this. As socialists and trade unionists we know we are stronger when we work together.

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**‘Whatever we judge, whatever we measure, illustrates what we value as a country’**

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Whatever we judge, whatever we measure, illustrates what we value as a country. We have the opportunity to learn the lessons of the past and be brave about shaping our future and we need to grasp it. We need to think radically. I’ve given my thoughts and now it’s over to you.

*Emma Hardy is the Member of Parliament for West Hull and Hessle. Prior to entering Parliament, she worked as a teacher and then for the National Union of Teachers. She is a member of Labour’s National Policy Forum.*

# Schools, Happiness and Mental Well-Being

According to a report in *The Guardian* on July 13<sup>th</sup>, the number of under-19s being treated by the NHS for mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders, has reached the record total of 400,000 a year.

The charity “Young Minds” warns that this total represents an underestimate of the true scale of need as many more children who would benefit from treatment are unable to access it.

NHS England admits that only 25% of children with a diagnosable mental health problem ever receive treatment, largely because the number of psychiatrists who specialise in the treatment of young people is insufficient to meet demand and, indeed, has been declining. The period from 2013 to 2017 saw a 6.6% fall in the numbers of such specialists.

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## **‘We need to ask ourselves what is causing mental health problems’**

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The government’s green paper of last November proposed that tackling this growing problem should be a priority and, among its proposals, is an increased role for schools in identifying pupils with problems. However, “Young Minds”, while welcoming this development, point out that what is needed is long term investment, both in schools and in the NHS.

“Schools”, says Tom Madders, the charity’s director, “must be given the resources and recognition they need to make children’s well-being a genuine priority”. No-one looking at the

current state of school finances could feel much optimism about this coming to pass and there is growing evidence that, for many young people, school is more likely to be part of the problem than of the solution.

How seriously the government really takes matters can be seen in its treatment of Natasha Devon, whom it appointed in August 2015 to inquire into and report on the state of children’s mental well-being. Addressing a conference of private school heads in 2016, Devon said:

“We need to ask ourselves what is causing mental health problems in the first place. Time and time again over recent years young people – and the people who teach them – have spoken out about how a rigorous culture of testing and academic pressure is detrimental to their mental health. At one end of the scale we’ve got four-year-olds being tested, at the other end of the scale we’ve got teenagers leaving school and facing the prospect of leaving university with record amounts of debt. Anxiety is the fastest growing illness in under 21s. These things are not a coincidence.”

The conference was told that though drinking, smoking, drug taking and teenage pregnancy were down among young people, rates of depression and anxiety have increased by 70% in a generation, admissions to hospital as a result of self-harm have doubled in four years and calls to the counselling service ChildLine about exam stress have tripled.

Devon condemned those who said the younger generation needed to toughen up to deal with the stress of life, and misused words such as ‘character’, ‘grit’ and ‘resilience’, as it implied having a mental illness “is somehow a defect of the individual”.

Shortly after giving this address, Devon was sacked by the government.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE “YOUNG MINDS” REVIEW**

**W**e are calling on the Government to re-balance the education system, so that the well-being of students is considered as important as academic attainment.

To tackle the mental health crisis in our classrooms, and to transform outcomes for young people, the Government must put well-being at the very heart of the education system.

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## **‘Government must put well-being at the very heart of the education system’**

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We know that many schools are delivering high quality, innovative programmes to make sure their pupils are happy and healthy, but too often they face significant barriers.

Currently, schools are incentivised to focus on exams, without the capacity, time, and resource to invest in students’ social and emotional development.

These five key recommendations are necessary so that all schools can help their students build resilience, promote emotional well-being, and respond effectively to mental health problems. These changes would mean all young people leave school with the skills they need to thrive in adulthood.

**Recommendation 1:**

The Government must update existing legislation to enshrine well-being as a fundamental priority of schools.

Primary legislation must contain a clear duty on all schools to promote well-being and good mental health for their pupils. The Government should also develop new, detailed statutory guidance, so that schools have a blueprint for delivering this duty.

**Recommendation 2:**

The Ofsted inspection framework should be updated to emphasise the importance of a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools.

To enable the well-being of students to become an integral part of school improvement and development plans there needs to be a much stronger emphasis on mental health and well-being within the Ofsted inspection framework.

Schools must be inspected on how effectively they promote good mental health and well-being, as well as their academic results.

The Ofsted inspection framework must include a description of how schools can create a positive learning environment,

which fosters resilience, wellbeing and healthy development.

**Recommendation 3:**

The Government should develop, trial and establish a well-being measurement framework by 2020.

Schools will have different baseline standards of wellbeing, based on demographics and other factors. Comparing schools directly may be misleading, but measurement is essential to drive improvement.

The Government should provide schools with the tools to measure their own progress in this area, and results should be published and available to pupils and parents.

**Recommendation 4:**

Embed an understanding of well-being, mental health and resilience in all teacher training.

The framework of core content for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) is inadequate. To ensure all teachers are able to confidently support their students' mental health and well-being needs, the ITT framework should be expanded to include a designated component on mental health awareness.

However, simply upskilling newly qualified teachers is not the whole answer and will lead to further inconsistencies in the provision of well-being.

All teachers should have a fundamental understanding of mental health and well-being and this needs to be reflected in mandatory Continuing Professional Development such as INSET days.

YoungMinds is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people at [www.youngminds.org.uk/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/)

**EP Comments...**

*The fact that mental well-being is completely overlooked in current legislation informs these recommendations, which have been made within the existing framework of school inspection and accountability. We would expect something radically different from the structures created by a new National Education Service. In fact, happiness and well-being should be central concerns. British school children are some of the unhappiest in the world. Such a situation cannot be replicated in truly socialist system of education. A necessary first step will be to dispense with the totally unnecessary pressures created by the targets and testing regime.*

This article first appeared in the August 2018 edition of **CASEnotes**, magazine of the Campaign for State Education. [campaignforstateeducation.org.uk](http://campaignforstateeducation.org.uk)

**CASEnotes** Issue 68 - August 2018  
News and views from Campaign for State Education

**SCHOOLS AND MENTAL WELL-BEING**

*This edition of CASEnotes is chiefly concerned with the relationship between schooling and children's mental well-being.*

According to a report in *The Guardian* on July 12<sup>th</sup>, the number of under-19s being treated by the NHS for mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders, has reached the record total of 400,000 a year.

The charity "Young Minds" warns that this total represents an underestimate of the true scale of need as many more children who would benefit from treatment are unable to access it.

The charity's *Five Recommendations to Government* are on pages 3 and 4.

NHS England admits that only 25% of children with a diagnosable mental health problem ever receive treatment, largely because the number of psychiatrists who specialise in the treatment of young people is insufficient to meet demand and, indeed, has been declining. The period from 2013 to 2017 saw a 6.6% fall in the numbers of such specialists.

The government's green paper of last November proposed that tackling this growing problem should be a priority and, among its proposals, is an increased role for schools in identifying pupils with problems. However, "Young Minds" while welcoming this development, point out that what is needed is long term investment, both in schools and in the NHS.

"Schools" says Tom Maddox, the charity's director, "must be given the resources and recognition they need to make children's well-being a genuine priority".

No-one looking at the current state of school finances could feel much optimism about this coming to pass and there is growing evidence that, for many young people, school is more likely to be part of the problem than of the solution.

How seriously the government really takes matters can be seen in its treatment of Natasha Devon, whom it

appointed in August 2015 to inquire into and report on the state of children's mental well-being. Addressing a conference of private school heads in 2016, Devon said,

"We need to ask ourselves what is causing mental health problems in the first place. Time and time again over recent years young people – and the people who teach them – have spoken up about how a rigorous culture of testing and academic pressure is detrimental to their mental health."

"At one end of the scale we've got four-year-olds being tested; at the other end of the scale we've got teenagers leaving school and facing the prospect of leaving university with record amounts of debt. Anxiety is the fastest growing illness in under 25s. These things are not a coincidence."

The conference was told that though drinking, smoking, drug taking and teenage pregnancy were down among young people, rates of depression and anxiety have increased by 70% in a generation, admissions to hospital as a result of self-harm have doubled in four years and calls to the counselling service Chabline about exam stress have tripled.

Devon condemned those who said the younger generation needed to toughen up to deal with the stress of life, and misused words such as "character", " grit" and "resilience", as it implied having a mental illness "is somehow a defect of the individual".

Shortly after giving this address, Devon was sacked by the government.

CASE believes in a fully comprehensive, locally accountable and democratic education system.

CASE notes 1

# Ofsted - what is it good for?

Louise Regan

Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, was set up in 1992. It has been through numerous changes since that time and the school inspection framework has changed dramatically, but Ofsted – and what it stands for – has always been a disliked by many in the teaching profession.

Any inspection system should have at its core the ability for schools to understand their own strengths and areas for development, to build on those strengths and to put in high quality positive support to develop identified areas of need.

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**'There is a lack of consistency, lack of trust and in many cases genuine fear'**

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The current school inspection system is a far cry from this. It is a punitive, top-down system. A team of inspectors arrive, inspect, report and leave. The lack of respect for education professionals, the lack of dialogue and genuine problem solving is harming, not helping, children's education.

There is a lack of consistency, lack of trust and in many cases genuine fear of the inspection system. This is not good for anyone in our education system.

A review by the right-wing think tank Policy Exchange in 2014 found that observations by inspectors were often unreliable, with around a fifty-fifty chance

that the inspectors judged a lesson to be of the same standard as data on pupil progress showed it to be. The report stated: "when it comes to relying on judgment of a trained Ofsted inspector on how effective a lesson, you would be better off flipping a coin."

A YouGov poll of teachers found that only 15% of them believed that Ofsted inspections make a positive contribution to school improvement; just 9% believed they capture a rounded picture of all the school's work; only 12% agreed that they are a reliable measure of school performance; and just 7% of teachers concluded that inspections supported school improvement.

Research by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) showed how the inspection system in England penalises those schools serving the most disadvantaged

communities. The report stated that the evidence "suggests that the inspection system may not be fully equitable to schools with challenging intakes. We have found that the least disadvantaged schools are most likely to be judged 'good' or 'outstanding', and that notable proportions of 'good' and 'outstanding' schools are not downgraded following a substantial deterioration in their academic performance."

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**'Ofsted has created a toxic culture in our schools and education establishments'**

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Ofsted has created a toxic culture in our schools and education establishments. The fear and anxiety around expectations has increased workload and whilst this has been recognised, very little has actually changed. Ofsted have published



**Ofsted - not fit for purpose**

various documents but staff in schools still report that inspectors enter with preconceived ideas and expectations.

There have been increasing concerns about the inspection systems role in the forced academisation of schools. The academisation system faces regular criticism and there is no evidence that it is having the impact on school standards that the government said it would, yet the inspection system is being used to force through academisation even where it isn't wanted by the local school community.

Concerns have also been raised about the inability to challenge these judgements and the fact that the complaints system is not independent, creating a lack of trust.

In August 2017, the High Court quashed the special measures verdict on an Academy in South London, describing Ofsted's complaints procedure as "not a rational or fair process". Ofsted's guidance at the time stated that

schools judged to have serious weaknesses or to require special measures would not need to be reconsidered because "all such judgements are subject to extended quality assurance procedures," and therefore by definition infallible. This was described as "Alice in Wonderland," by the judge.

A recent newspaper report showing that Ofsted has given well-paid officials collectively up to £185,000 in bonuses over the past two financial years when the majority of schools are facing significant budget cuts and when staff in schools have faced years of pay freeze or below inflation awards has made many question not only the bonuses but the significant salaries of officials.

The final and most recent confrontation between Ofsted and the National Education Union came just days after the DfE had issued a statement trying to silence those in education speaking out about what is happening, saying they should not express 'political views'.

Apparently this does not apply to the Chief Inspector of Schools who stated that "Ofsted has no evidence that the quality of education has been affected by school funding cuts."

Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the National Education Union called for the abolition of Ofsted because it was unable to speak truth to power. He raised the cuts to arts subjects and reductions in special needs support as examples of the way funding pressures are affecting education. He also suggested Ofsted had not found evidence because it focused too heavily on exam results.

He went on to say, "I think Ofsted is not doing the right job. We need an inspectorate that will speak truth to power. Ofsted is trying to blame schools for becoming exam factories instead of telling the government that they are running our education system wrongly. And to cap it all, to say that the education budget isn't having an impact – it tells you that we don't really have an independent inspectorate that is speaking truth to the government. I think we need to go back to HMI."

It is time for a system of school improvement that puts those that work in education at its core. School self-review, with peer support and evaluation, building on strengths, celebrating the diversity of our school community and investing in high quality professional development.

It is time to put our trust back in the people doing the job. Let's let the teachers teach and the children and young people learn – through play, pleasure and enjoyment.

### Fit for Purpose?

*"We haven't seen anything yet from school inspections that says that schools are unable to provide a good quality of education by reason of funding."*

**Amanda Spielman**  
**Head of Ofsted**

# The NES and higher education: *what next?* Pam Tatlow

The National Education Service as espoused in Labour's 2017 election manifesto offered the prospect of a very different approach to education than that pursued by the Coalition and now the Conservative Government. Popular with party members, education staff and voters in particular because of its commitment to free education, the NES should be the springboard for a raft of more detailed proposals as to how it will be delivered by a Labour Government.

This is why the National Policy Forum report on education is a missed opportunity. While no-one expected every i to be dotted or t to be crossed, those who made submissions, gave evidence in person or made the effort to attend those consultation meetings that were held, are entitled to feel disappointment at the end result – a publication that deals in generalisations and adds little to what we already knew.

If this was the intention, the NPF report has certainly succeeded but matters cannot be allowed to rest here. The alternative is that the details are belatedly fleshed out before an election with little input from those, including the Socialist Education Association who might steer the Party in the right direction – or that Labour candidates find themselves on the campaign trail unable to answer obvious questions about where the Party stands on the future of academies, grammar schools, selections, school organisation and accountability – to name but a few.

It also goes without saying that Labour's intentions on higher education remain equally vague beyond the commitment to free education which includes the scrapping not only of university tuition fees but the advanced learner loans that now have to be taken out by those aged 19 and

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## **'Free tuition is the key to Labour's commitment to life-long learning'**

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over who want to study for Level 3 qualifications but who cannot afford course fees – a scandal if ever there was one.

Free tuition is of course the key to Labour's commitment to life-long learning.

This means the return of grants to universities and should mean

the dismantling of the market regulator, given the bizarre title of the Office of Students (OfS) under the Conservative's 2015 Higher Education and Research Act (HERA). The OfS has statutory responsibilities and duties to manage the market on the assumption that students are consumers. Labour should undoubtedly commit to abolish the OfS without delay and repeal and replace HERA with a new Higher Education Act but also review the award of university title.

In an effort to further incentivise the market promoted by HERA and encourage private providers to enter the market, the award of university title in England, previously highly valued and hard-earned, has been



undermined with the criteria reduced and the prospect of organisations being able to award degrees on a probationary basis and being awarded university title even though they have traded for less than three years. Labour should commit to review both the process and the criteria for the award of university title in England and review whether private and for-profit organisations awarded university title under these reduced criteria should be allowed to retain the latter.

Rather than restore a Higher Education Funding Council for England, Labour should establish a University and Higher Education Grants Committee (UHEGC) with a remit to agree grant levels with universities and higher education institutions. This has the potential to address the consequences of the Conservative's decision to deregulate funded student numbers from 2015. The Government line is that this has widened opportunities and ensured that all students who are judged to be qualified can get a university place without interference of the Treasury.

Like much higher education policy since 2010, this is a sleight of hand not only because the Treasury has continued to cut what little teaching grant that still exists but also because deregulation has simply allowed some universities to trade on their historic reputation and commercially produced university league tables which are themselves heavily reliant on research funding.

These universities have done well out of this free-for-all

including by lowering advertised grades while universities that have been the heavy lifters in terms of more socially inclusive student profiles including by offering opportunities to older less mobile students, have seen their resources and income cut.

Everyone knows that money talks. A University and HE Grants Committee could link funding allocations with the recruitment or otherwise by universities and higher education institutions of a more diverse population of students – or face the prospect that a reduction in grant would result if this was not achieved.

**'universities must ensure by action and not just warm words the dismal failure to date to ensure that black student attainment matches that of their white peers'**

There is every reason to believe that those universities which have made a dash for growth, sometimes at the expense of staff hours, contracts and the student experience and in some cases with damaging impacts on local communities, might well change their tune.

But a Grants Committee should also be tasked by a Labour Government with ensuring that universities address by action and not just warm words the dismal failure to date to ensure that black student attainment matches that of their white peers with the same pre-entry qualifications.

The abolition of tuition fees for undergraduate and other higher education qualifications would open up new possibilities for postgraduates. The Grants Committee should have a remit to

restore funding for postgraduate teaching, abolished when higher fees were introduced, and direct funding of universities was cut from 2012. Free tuition would undoubtedly provide new opportunities for part-time and mature students whose numbers have dropped like a stone since 2012. The restoration and extension of maintenance grants and loans by the Welsh Government from 2018-19 and their extension to all students whether full or part-time, provides a model to which Labour could also commit.

Labour should reiterate its commitment to restore NHS bursaries for nurses, midwives and other professional healthcare staff who have been required to take out higher education loans since 2016. Not only is this a vote-winner it's an obvious winner for individuals and the NHS.

Of course, all this will be labelled as unaffordable by some economists and by those who argue that paying off a loan for 30 years, never being able to repay in full but having it written-off by taxpayers at the end of the repayment period is progressive. While in strict economic terminology this may be the correct, when explained to most people this money merry-go-round makes little sense. To add insult to injury it is hugely inefficient, costly to administer and leaks like a sieve.

The fact remains that higher education is being funded by the Government but smoke and mirrors accounting methods make it appear that the deficit and departmental spending is lower if higher education is funded via student loans.

The same applies to historic tuition fee debt. While much has been made of Jeremy Corbyn's reference (without commitment) to this during the 2017 election campaign, the stark reality is that the majority of this debt is never going to be repaid. There are strong arguments for Labour to bite the bullet, change how this appears in the accounting columns of the Treasury and commit to its write-off.

While unlikely to catch the public imagination, university staff and unions are likely to welcome a commitment to abolish the Teaching Excellence Framework. (TEF). Manufactured by Conservative Ministers to allegedly provide students with more information and promote 'consumer' choice, the TEF is a huge waste of time and resource and is not, and never can be, a reliable measure of teaching quality.

Disappointingly the NPF report

refers yet again to academic and vocational routes and bemoans the lack of quality vocational pathways. Although popular, this 'sheep and goats' approach ignores the fact that the majority of students now enter university with a vocational qualification and that many university and other higher education qualifications such as HNCs and HNDs have a professional and technical focus, require the input of employers and work placements not to mention degree apprenticeships and sandwich courses.

There is however another nut that the Labour needs to crack. The overwhelming majority of research funding provided by taxpayers is allocated to 12 universities. Research funding has been further concentrated under the Conservatives who used HERA to hive e research funding off to a new organisation, UK research and Innovation (UKRI). Unlike other European countries,

there is now no funding for research judged to be of national significance. Nor is there any link between research allocations and the number of students taught in any institution even though research funding provides capital as well as revenue resources and underpins investment in facilities which students use including laboratories and learning resources.

There is little chance that Labour's commitments to deliver a robust regional strategy will be fulfilled if the status quo is maintained in the allocations of the public funding for research and innovation. This will require radical new thinking from the shadow Treasury, Education and Business teams. The benefits would be immeasurable and without it, Labour is unlikely to be able to fully tackle historic patterns of lower growth and productivity in regions outside London and the South-East.



*Socialist Educational Association* | Conference Fringe

# ***THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE*** **FROM VISION** **TO REALITY**

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**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 6.00 to 7.30**

**ACC Concourse Room 4**

(in the main conference centre so passes are required)

## **Speakers:**

**John Bolt** (SEA General Secretary)

**Louise Regan** (Past President, NUT)

**Emma Hardy MP**

**Melissa Benn** (Campaigner and Writer)

The aim of the meeting is to share and promote the SEA's vision of what a radical National Education Service should look like and to encourage the party to produce the detailed policies needed to bring this about.



The Socialist Educational Association is the only educational organisation affiliated to the Labour Party and can be described as its critical friend.

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