



Education Politics

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Tristram Hunt writes on
curriculum, exams,
and what to do
about the mess
see page six

A member of the group that has been advising the government on how to implement the new national curriculum for English state schools offers a scathing verdict: "The whole process has had a very chaotic feel. It's typical of government policy at the moment: they don't think things through very carefully, they don't listen to anyone and then just go ahead and rush into major changes."



**The national
curriculum in
England**
Framework document

July 2013



Editorial

In November, the twittersphere was taken over by #CameronMustGo. It remained a top-trending # in the UK for many days, and reached no.3 globally. The BBC News page which monitors trending tweets did not notice this phenomenon for some time.

The question is, who did notice? Can social media effectively challenge the influence of the established media in political debate? We see much of the national press winding up the nastiness quotient in their attacks on Labour, and while the BBC no doubt still seeks impartiality its editorial decision-making in a period of multi-party politics is more complex and more questionable. Or maybe tweets mostly preach to the converted?

Your editor has mixed feelings about social media, but following @SocEduAss is a good way to keep up with what the SEA is thinking. If you do tweet on education, you will be interested in our last word in this edition, by Emma Ann Hardy who is almost on perma-tweet while doing a teaching job, a family job, and union and political activist jobs.

If this stuff is not your cup of tea, do try www.socialisteducationalassociation.org, the refreshed SEA web-site. It's meant to be interactive, you are encouraged to add your opinion.

Meanwhile, this old-fashioned publication develops themes introduced in the previous edition: Labour's agreed education policy, and the need to campaign on it and not some other bright ideas; and the importance of a new approach to curriculum and assessment. There are also reviews of recent events, more on higher education, and another contribution to the debate about democratic accountability in the education system.

Readers will no doubt examine closely Tristram Hunt's piece. He makes a strong case for professional autonomy in matters of curriculum and pedagogy. This is welcome, as is his recognition of the problems within the teaching profession, including a fast-approaching shortage crisis - and of the size of the teacher vote. He confronts a difficult choice: schools are unhappy with recent changes in curriculum and qualifications - and unhappy with continual change. Perhaps the teacher unions have a responsibility here. They should put every effort into understanding their memberships' attitudes to this dilemma, and give leadership to the profession on this ticklish issue.

However Mr.Hunt deals with these problems when in office, the SEA will continue to seek constructive relationships with Labour education ministers. But they must be part of a new politics which the Leader promised but has not been able to deliver. The country wants an education policy which addresses the main issues in plain language. We need policy which deals with the widely recognised aspiration of parents for good local schools. We require policy which uses evidence, not cherry-picked for political points-scoring, but a balanced assessment of the whole evidence base.

We are confident that the evidence supports SEA's core commitments. Selection depresses achievement - as Selina Todd so devastatingly demonstrated in her Caroline Benn memorial lecture. Maybe it is not good politics to pick a fight on this during the election campaign, but a quiet nod from Mr.Hunt to his supporters that reflects the Party's policy would be welcome.

Let us be plain: his proposals on pages 6-7 should please the profession and all Labour supporters. But every time Mr.Hunt makes a gimmick speech - a teacher oath, building character, private schools (yes, Party policy but very much a minority interest amongst the electorate) - their hearts sink, and more importantly the electorate switch off. The electorate wants to hear how a Labour government would support the continuous improvement in pupils' learning experiences, would improve the accountability of schools to their communities, would bear down on the worrying increase in corruption and malpractice in our schools, would make school admissions fairer.

The agreed Labour Party policy addresses most of this agenda. In some cases, more flesh needs to be put on the policy bones. In particular, John Bolt's highly instructive piece (pages 16-18) on a design for local administrative arrangements for schools deserves careful study, working as it does within the agreed Party policy.

@TristramHuntMP has 27,100 followers, but he is noticed much more when he makes a speech or writes an article. Talking about the bread and butter concerns of voters in a bread and butter way is the way to a Labour victory we so desperately need.

Martin Johnson

Labour's policy: the commitments

The following statements from the Labour Party Education and Children Policy are limited to the major commitments. The Policy Forum process led to repetitious drafting, but the clearest form of each commitment is reproduced here, although not in the order in the policy. It also contains a number of aspirations without specific commitments, which are also not reported here.

on staffing

Labour will ensure all teachers in state funded schools have, or are working towards, a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Labour will also work to improve the quality of initial teacher training and ensure that teachers receive appropriate training for working with children with particular needs, such as those who are gifted and talented and those with a special educational need (SEN). Under Labour teachers will be expected to undertake regular professional development, linked to revalidation on a rolling basis. We support and will maintain the national conditions and review body structure for teachers, and will extend this commitment to school support staff by reinstating the School Staff Negotiating Body set up by the last Labour Government, to develop a much needed consistency in pay. Every secondary school should have access to a qualified school nurse, as should clusters of primary schools.

on curriculum

Labour will amend the inspection framework so that schools will be judged on whether they are delivering a "broad and balanced" curriculum. Labour will extend to all schools the freedoms academies can use to innovate and raise standards, such as freedom over the curriculum. Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) would be compulsory in all public-funded schools. Labour will revive and strengthen independent careers advice in schools and give young people the opportunity to access face-to-face careers guidance, supported by fully qualified careers professionals and linked to economic need and partnership working.

We will progress the recommendations of the Skills Taskforce Review and establish an over-arching national baccalaureate framework for all post-16 students. This framework will include high quality academic and vocational courses, the continued study of English and mathematics by all, opportunities for extended research and the development of personal skills and qualities. We will

introduce a new gold standard Technical Baccalaureate for young people, acting as a stepping stone into an apprenticeship, further study or skilled work. The Tech Bacc will be accredited by business and include a high quality vocational qualification, work experience, and English and maths. Labour will review the impact of financial barriers, such as the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance, and other constraints on the participation of young people, particularly those from low income households, in continuing education and training.

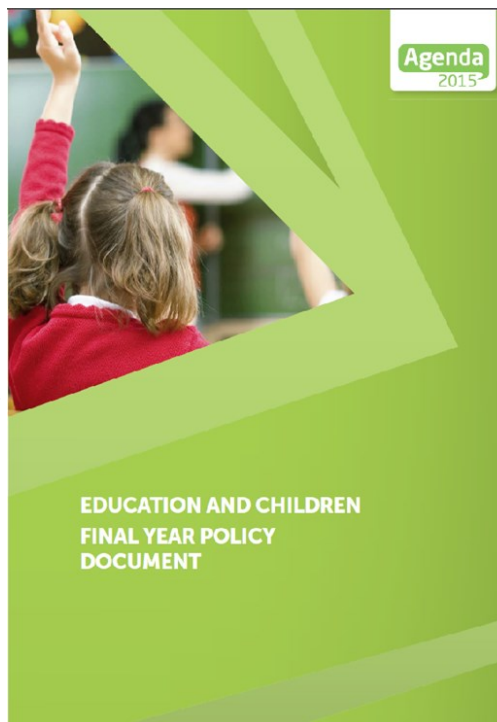
apprenticeship

Labour will reform Sector Skills Councils and LEPs. Labour will ensure more apprenticeships are focused on new entrants to the jobs market, include more off-the-job training, where appropriate, and last for a minimum of two years and at least three years in technical sectors such as construction, engineering and manufacturing. There will be an emphasis on advanced apprenticeships to at least level three, underpinned by real, well-paid full-time jobs, clear routes of progress at all levels, mentoring, work-based learning and technical instruction through bona fide provider and college networks. Labour is committed to dramatically increasing the number of apprenticeships.

on structures

Labour would give local authorities the powers to appoint and help to hold to account Directors of School Standards, who will hold all schools to account, regardless of structure, for their performance and intervene in poorly performing schools. All governing bodies should include significant numbers of governors who represent local communities. We will clearly set out the role and responsibilities of local authorities and Directors of School Standards and the way in which they will work positively together.

Labour will end the Government's Free Schools programme. We will ensure existing Free Schools become part of the local family of schools and that the Director of School Standards can work with governors, parents and school leaders on school improvement in all schools, including Free Schools. Local authorities in conjunction with Directors of School Standards will be responsible for overseeing the commissioning of new schools, taking decisions based on the needs of the local area as set out by local authorities. With Labour, local authorities will be able to open new community schools once



again. Action on school standards would include the possibility of changing a school's status, including to that of a community school if appropriate.

All schools will be required to collaborate with other local schools, follow the admissions code, ensure their teachers are or become qualified, and play their part in educating hard-to-place children. Labour will give local areas the powers to direct all schools to admit hard-to-place and vulnerable children. It will be a requirement for all schools to partner with weaker schools as a condition for attaining an 'outstanding' rating by Ofsted.

Labour believes the role of the Schools Inspectorate needs examining. In government, we will ensure the inspection process is more collaborative, and that school improvement involves schools reviewing one another and monitoring by the middle tier, as well as the national inspectorate.

The next Labour Government will ensure the Charity Commission rigorously assesses private schools' charitable activity and seeks to take enforcement action where appropriate.

Any funding model [for higher education] should move away from increasing fees and debt and towards a model of entitlement for students and contributions from graduates. A Labour government would provide provision for literacy and numeracy classes for people of all ages who lack the basic

skills in English and maths, and would take measures to encourage people not in work or training to take up this opportunity.

on child-care

We will restore early intervention at the heart of our approach to supporting children and their parents, with Sure Start playing a key role. Labour will assess the effective practices of Sure Start centres, including early years and play strategies and age appropriate learning, and will provide an environment in which schools can work alongside Sure Start centres and nurseries, to ensure an equal childhood becomes an equal education.

The next Labour Government will expand free childcare from 15 to 25 hours per week for

working parents of three and four year-olds as soon as we take office. Labour will also introduce a legal guarantee of access to wraparound care from 8am to 6pm through their local school.

We will continue the universal free school meals initiative for all infants in English primary schools. We will work with schools to develop breakfast clubs.

Under a Labour government there would be, where parents chose it, a strong presumption in favour of inclusion in mainstream education for disabled children with special educational needs.

Who Has the Ear of Tristram Hunt?

Sheila Doré

In his speech to Labour Party conference Tristram Hunt had an excellent opportunity to fill the post-Gove void and persuade all those with an interest and a stake in education not only to vote Labour but also to go out and inspire others to vote Labour. Instead, his seven minute speech received lukewarm applause and certainly not the standing ovation awarded to other shadow ministers: Ed Balls, Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper et al, all of whom delivered speeches packed with policy and sometimes with passion. None of the great questions raised by Michael Gove's reign over education were addressed. The Guardian reported, 'The shadow education secretary's most obvious ambition was to get out of the hall as fast as possible and no one was minded to thwart it.'

Tristram did state that 'only a Labour government will ensure our schools are not privatised for profit'. This does not mean they will not be privatised i.e. removed from any degree of local authority oversight and given to unelected Directors of School Standards and private academy chains. As

Martin Johnson and Warwick Mansell have shown in their report 'Education Not for Sale', a great deal of covert privatisation of education has gone on already and continues apace.

In her address to conference, Angela Eagle, Chair of the National Policy Forum, warmly commended the thoroughly democratic process of policy making, represented by the Policy Commissions, culminating in the three days of discussion and debate in Milton Keynes. She expressed great confidence in presenting the final policy documents to conference to be endorsed because they represented the views of Labour party members and affiliated trade unions and societies. I attended the NPF and can confirm that her confidence was well founded.

In his speech, Ed Miliband pledged that a Labour government would 'devolve power to local government, bringing power closer to people right across England'. Where, then, does Tristram Hunt belong in all this? At each of the fringe meetings he delivered a few comments about 'world class teachers' and 'the forgotten 50%' but refuted any suggestion that local authorities should have an enhanced role in managing, commissioning and overseeing schools despite the NPF document pledges [see *above*]. At a packed NUT fringe

meeting Tristram garnered applause by announcing that 'Labour will end the government's 'Free Schools' programme' but this firm commitment did not appear in his speech to conference.

Yet Mr. Hunt seemed most at home at a small fringe meeting run by the Policy Exchange think tank, the title of which was 'Parent-led academies, Directors of School Standards and collaboration for all. What should Labour promise on schools in 2015?' The speakers were Tristram, John Blake of 'Labour Teachers', Chris Keates, General Secretary NASUWT, Laura McInerney from 'Academies Week' and Jonathan Simons, Head of Education, Policy Exchange. Labour Teachers is not affiliated to the Labour Party and Policy Exchange is David Cameron's favourite think tank. Jonathan Simons spoke at some length on the necessity to academies all primary schools and John Blake concurred, citing two primary schools in his area, Haringey, that been forced to become academies and 'were now doing much better'. Tristram Hunt did his now familiar thing of talking about 'world class teachers' and then went on to talk about the success of the 'London Challenge' and how Labour will roll out similar schemes in the rest of the country. He then announced a new policy of setting up 'Parent-led Academies'; 'free schools' in all but name. When asked what the difference was between the two he didn't seem to know. When asked if he was frightened that middle class parents with sharp elbows would simply use public money for their own children, he seemed to think that was all right.



What is the democratic mandate for this policy? It did not appear in his speech. It certainly does not appear in the NPF document and it is opposed by all the major teaching unions, as well as respected educational academics.

The whole meeting was predicated on the assumption that the audience were ignorant of the real facts. The success of the London Challenge did not depend on academies but on local authority maintained schools working together. As the Ofsted report on the London Challenge stated, '30% of London's 377 local authority controlled secondary schools were judged to be outstanding, reflecting the positive impact of the London Challenge. Of the 34 academies in London that have been inspected 8 (or 24%) were outstanding'.

Those schools that became academies following the London Challenge have not fared well. 'Twenty former London Challenge schools have become academies. In five of the six academies visited for this survey, the change in designation appears to have separated them from the networks of support that they once enjoyed. Since 2006, three of these five have improved in terms of their overall effectiveness, as judged by Ofsted. Their commitment to school improvement has become much narrower in its reach, limited – in most of the cases that inspectors encountered directly – to other academies. This risks leading to separate networks of expertise.'

Furthermore, Henry Stewart's research on 'The Academies Illusion' for the Local Schools Network states 'For those schools whose GCSE benchmark was in the 20-40% range in 2011, academies increased by 7.8% and maintained schools by 7.7%. Both are great improvements and the schools deserve to be congratulated. However it makes little difference whether the school was an academy or not.'

This is despite the billions that have been spent on academies, much of it misspent as the recent report on academies by the House of Commons Education Select Committee Report clearly shows. Stewart also demonstrates that 'Students in academies are more likely to take "equivalent qualifications": and that they are 'less likely to take history or geography GCSE'. He concludes that academies are not transformative. 'The data does not back up this view. Students in sponsored academies are less likely to take the humanities and language GCSEs that our Secretary of State (was) so keen to promote. Many are doing well and have seen significant growth in GCSE results. However this increase is just as large in similar non-academies and is more likely in academies not to be based on actual GCSE exams.'

The suggestion that the wholesale academisation of the primary sector is also necessary is therefore also false. Currently only 11% of primary schools are academies but as Ofsted pointed out in its 2012/13 Annual Report 'there has been a larger increase in the proportion of good or outstanding primary schools. Overall there are more 'good' or better primary schools (78%) than secondary schools (71%).

Appearing on the same platform as Jonathan Simons and John Blake, Tristram Hunt's utterances were certainly not based on the facts nor on Labour Party policy. Is this a new 'go it alone, with a little help from my friends' approach from Tristram Hunt? The Labour movement expects and deserves more from a shadow Secretary of State. It is entitled to ask – 'Who does have the ear of Tristram Hunt?'

**Sheila Doré is the Chair of SEA,
Labour's only educational affiliate**

Restoring the freedom to teach

Tristram Hunt

'There's been too much change and political interference. After workload, this sentiment is perhaps the most common complaint I hear from teachers on my school visits. 'But of course you must change this and that and this' is how the conversation often proceeds.

Such is the paradox of education reform. And thanks to Michael Gove's four year 'reign of terror' it is more apt than ever. Overnight accountability changes; assessment criteria changed on a whim; grade boundaries shifted by diktat - this frenzied churn of 'initiative-itis' has seen the workload of the average primary and secondary classroom teacher increase by nine and six hours a week respectively. Perhaps even more than his wilful denigration of teachers' professionalism, this is why the former Education Secretary was so vilified. It explains why 40% of new teacher trainees leave the job within the first five years. And why too many experienced teachers leave the profession altogether. But far worse: it gets in the way of teachers excelling at their work and passing on their love of learning to our children.



Acknowledging this is the starting point for Labour's approach to the curriculum. Because unfortunately, whilst we all know that the new national curriculum is far from perfect, few policies contribute more to teacher burn-out than wholesale curriculum reform. A period of stability is hardly an exciting rallying cry but it is absolutely vital that the incoming government take account of the classroom realities. We know that assessment criteria have become absurdly reductive in the removal of the valuable practical components to so many GCSEs. We know that, notwithstanding the welcome move to 'Progress Eight', current performance measures retain the capacity to narrow the scope of schooling. And we know that many primary schools need proactive support in developing an alternative to levels. On all of these issues the Labour Party will keep a watching brief and take the necessary action in government to support our principles of social justice and equal opportunity. But if the last

four years have taught us nothing else it is that we must be cognisant of the impact political decisions have upon classroom morale and workload. Therefore, we must pursue our broader reform agenda at a pragmatic pace; through consensus not confrontation.

Our policy on AS and A levels is a perfect example of this contrast. Misguided policy-making; politically timed announcements; a pig-headed refusal to listen to the evidence; and an administrative incompetence bordering on negligence - the decoupling of A and AS levels combines everything we have come to expect from this government's approach to the curriculum. A London School of Economics report has found that decoupling will significantly narrow opportunity. This is a policy which is bad for access and bad for excellence. Universities value the AS Level as a good indication of future potential. Students value the examination as a good indication of their level. Schools value it as a spur to action for the more lackadaisical. Therefore, make no mistake: the next Labour government will pursue a swift reversal.

Yet this is a serious issue in the coming months too - young people are choosing their AS and A level options now. No matter that Labour's policy will actually widen their horizons - the Government should still be spelling out in detail the consequences of a Labour victory for the 2015/16 school year.

Ultimately all this comes as a consequence of deliberately timetabling curriculum reforms to take effect just four months after a general election. At every step Labour has pursued a non-partisan approach because we understand that the political calendar should not interrupt young people's efforts to secure their future happiness and prosperity. But so far the Government has singularly refused to listen to our requests for a pause - indicative of its wider, inconsiderate disdain for the classroom impact of its policies.

However, aside from direct curriculum changes Labour has announced a raft of policies which seek to spread opportunity and broaden young people's educational experience.

For example, we will take the first steps towards baccalaureate qualifications framework with a gold-standard 'Technical Baccalaureate' that, for perhaps the first time in our history, delivers opportunity to young people who wish to pursue excellence in vocational education.

We will introduce a primary school wrap-around childcare guarantee, which increases opportunities

for young people to access the breakfast clubs and after-school activities that widen horizons and cultivate character.

We will roll-out the last Labour Government's successful London Challenge programme across England, so that its spirit of collaboration and sharing resources becomes the national school improvement strategy.

And we will extend this collaborative impulse to private schools with a new Schools Partnership Standard which makes their business rates relief conditional upon sharing specialist teaching, curriculum and extra-curricular resources with local state schools.

Yet arguably our most important curriculum policy is the extension of the academy freedom from the national curriculum to all maintained schools.

Clearly, the National Curriculum must continue to shape standards and expectations. For this reason, we will make sure that delivery of a 'broad and balanced' curriculum becomes a key accountability criterion in the Ofsted framework. After all, if we have learnt nothing else from the scandal in Birmingham schools it is that a narrowly prescribed curriculum is far more open to abuse. What is more, where there is a clear and pressing need to guarantee important curriculum entitlements - as is the case with sex and relationship education - then we will use statutory powers to do so.

But there is no escaping the fact that Labour's freedoms policy is a challenge to those who see the National Curriculum as a 'to the letter' entitlement. However, I would argue that the two principles that motivate this policy - innovation and devolution - offer far richer rewards to the advancement of progressive educational ideals.

All around the world schools are using innovative curriculum approaches to prove there are no limits to what young people can achieve. Schools like High Tech High in San Diego, a school where 98% of a comprehensive intake graduate to college. Or School 21 - a school in a high-disadvantage area of Newham which recently received outstanding in every Ofsted category.

The Conservatives would like to pretend that the main driver for such innovation is structural reform. But what defines these schools' success is a progressive 21st century curriculum approach backed up by an innovative project-based pedagogy and world class teaching. The first principle behind the Free School programme has never been innovation or, for that matter, civic voluntarism. It was always the idea that aggressive, 'fly-or-fail' free market competition was the most effective way of improving achievement. Quite apart from the enormous financial waste this approach entails, the evidence from Sweden and elsewhere is beginning to highlight the damage such dogma can wreak

upon school standards. That is why the next Labour government would end the Free Schools programme.

Similarly, the freedoms offered through the Government's converter academy programme have proven largely chimerical, stymied by micro-management from a petty and overweening centre. This is a complete betrayal of the independence and professional autonomy, alongside a focus upon social justice and educational disadvantage, which were the principles behind Labour's original Sponsored Academy programme.

Yet we should not allow this distortion nor the Free Schools fiasco from inhibiting the progressive potential of bottom-up curriculum innovation. And this conversation should go beyond the debate about the National Curriculum. Because the truth is - as any good teacher knows - that learning in a vibrant classroom goes far beyond responding to programmes of study. No amount of national guidance can remove the need for pedagogical adaptation or any of the other tools of world class teaching. Developing a proper classroom-focused curriculum is an evolving, creative process - it should be school led and tailored by individual teachers in order to meet the learning requirements of individual children. Therefore, extending these freedoms to all maintained schools could help stimulate teachers' ability to achieve this as well as removing extremely unhelpful distinctions that have been mercilessly exploited to create divisions within our state schools system.

Bit by bit the Labour Party will chart a course away from the top-down, target-driven, exam-factory model of schooling which does nothing to nurture character, creativity and wellbeing and, as such, is so spectacularly ill-equipped for the demands of the 21st century. This spirit of creativity should filter into the ethos of our schools system too - but that requires giving teachers and leaders the powers to shape and adapt their own curriculum. As Eileen Wilkinson, Clement Attlee's first Education Minister said:

'It is important not to make plans that are too rigid. Schools must have freedom to experiment, and we need variety for the sake of freshness. We want laughter in the classroom, self-confidence growing every day, eager interest instead of bored uniformity.'

That quote perfectly encapsulates the motivation behind Labour's approach to the curriculum in 2015. But we must not forget the practical demand of taking teachers with us on this journey.

Tristram Hunt is the Shadow Secretary of State for Education

Creativity and power in the new national curriculum

Russell Hobby

The debate about the new national curriculum introduced by Michael Gove and the Coalition government brings out two issues critical to the direction of the education system. They expose the fundamental fault lines in competing philosophies and ideologies of education. One is the nature of creativity; the other is the nature of power. It doesn't get much more basic than that.

Take creativity. Teachers in this country are rightly proud of fostering creative, problem solving, enquiring minds who can work in teams to tackle the biggest challenges. Some accuse the government of imposing a dull, routine, fact driven curriculum which will ensure that students know plenty but struggle to apply that knowledge effectively later in life. Some question the value of knowledge in a world of rapid change and ready access to online information.

This looks like a stark contrast but I think it misunderstands the nature of creative problem solving (I'll focus on this rather than pure artistic endeavour). The most distinctive feature of human problem solving is our limited capacity - we can only work with a small number of variables at once. The more we commit routine skills and knowledge to memory the more space we have to think around the problem itself. Put another way: we can be more creative mathematicians if we're not spending a lot of time wondering what six times seven.

Many of the most creative people in a field, the thinkers who build new knowledge are the ones who have first mastered the old knowledge. To break the rules well, you first have to know the rules. And you don't create new Einsteins by getting young people to discover the theory of relativity themselves. First they master the best of what is already known; just like Einstein did.

I think we all can agree on the need for creative problem solvers. I don't think we should underestimate the importance of knowledge and the mastery of basic skills in creating the mental freedom to solve problems however.

It is entirely appropriate to say that we shouldn't stop there. To note that young people need to apply their knowledge; that character traits like persistence and concentration matter; that people need to use their knowledge collaboratively in teams as across cultures. All these are better angles of attack than a full frontal assault on knowledge itself.

What about power? In this context, it boils down to

our views on the old aphorism, 'knowledge is power'. On the one hand, we have people like Nick Gibb and ED Hirsch, often mischievously referencing Gramsci, who claim that you must give young people from disadvantaged backgrounds the knowledge that the elites take for granted. Then they can compete for leadership. They also, veering into neocon territory, speak of the value of common cultures for social cohesion. On the other side, you have people like Kristen Buras who claim that knowledge is not neutral. That it is selected and shaped to suit the needs of those in power. When we give this knowledge to marginalised groups, we are not giving them power but teaching them to obey, subconsciously shaping their values and experience to suit the needs of those in power. They note, for example, that the common core curriculum in the USA, selects examples of history that emphasis cohesion over conflict, subtly suggesting the current power structures work best.



There is truth on both sides of this argument. The solution lies in being more nuanced about what sort of knowledge we are addressing. Some knowledge is basic and useful - the laws of physics take no account of class or status; other types of knowledge are contested. To accept that some facts are selected and distorted needn't drive us to the conclusion that there are no facts at all. To accept that all knowledge is provisional doesn't excuse us from

working with best that we have until something better comes along; to accept that many categories of knowledge are socially constructed does not mean those categories are not useful.

We should teach children basic facts and skills, like literacy and numeracy, without any hesitation. We should teach agreed facts and concepts in geography, science and history. As children get older; we should introduce areas of doubt and controversy; we should encourage a critical mindset (while still offering a body of knowledge to get critical with) and, above all, we should seek to draw out the scientific method and philosophy, as well as the basic concepts of science. The attitude of humility, enquiry and vigilance against bias that characterises the best of scientific thinking is our ultimate protection.

Russell Hobby is the General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers. NAHT joined the TUC in November 2014.

Reclaiming Education Conference

15th November

Birmingham Council House

- *'we have the best teachers ever – but we burn them out'*
- *teachers are seriously afraid'*
- *'there's more openness about extending your house than there is about opening a school'*
- *schools have learning difficulties; universities have profound and multiple learning difficulties'*
- *'governors are allowed to act with no local accountability'*

With less than six months to the General Election, the fourth Reclaiming Education Conference, held in Birmingham in November, focussed on how to influence the parties in the direction of evidence-based progressive policies for education. The focus for the day was the 7 point plan drawn up by the conference organisers –

Alliance for Inclusive Education,

Campaign for State Education

Comprehensive Future

Forum Journal

Information for School and College Governors

Socialist Educational Association.

A series of speakers gave us their priorities – there's not room here to give a full account of their ideas but the key themes from a set of inspiring presentations were:

Tim Brighouse spoke unashamedly about structures not standards, wanting change in local governance, admissions, inspection, exams and pay and conditions. He held up the example of Scotland as a system 'with more hope and less fear'.

Laura McInerney highlighted the lack of transparency – the DfE consistently refuses to provide information about academies and free schools that any local authority would routinely provide. She called for a coherent approach to place planning, admissions and a recognition that the government is doing too much too fast.

Navin Kikabhai gave a devastating critique of how the system treats disabled children and the many ways in which the mainstream system denies access to such children. He argued for the dismantling of the segregated system and identified universities as sometimes the worst offenders.

Richard Hatcher argued for the need to restore local governance of education – not just local accountability but a local vision for what the community needs. He identified the Local Education Panels proposed in the Blunkett report as a positive proposal but urged too that there needs to be active

participation at a more local level through such initiatives as Children's Zones.

Mary Bousted urged delegates to get out of their comfort zone and 'find friends in unusual places'. It's important to start from what children and families want and need and the ATL manifesto seeks to do this. Like others she called for the radical reform of Ofsted and for 'collaborative not compliant workplaces.'



L-R: Tim Brighouse, Melian Mansfield (Chair), Laura McInerney, Navin Kikabhai

There was a strong feeling in the conference that education seems to be taking a back seat in the developing election campaign. An analysis of what the different parties are currently saying showed a range from 'back to the 50's' with UKIP, more privatisation and fragmentation with the Tories and only a fairly modest set of counter proposals from Labour.

There was a lot of support in the room for all the ideas put forward by the speakers. The final stage of the day was to challenge everyone there to identify what they could do to raise the profile of education in the election and to get the parties, especially Labour, to adopt more ambitious policies.

Delegates recorded their personal commitments. These included:

- work to set up a local Education Forum
- set up a petition through 38 degrees
- use freedom of information to get information
- get local parties to support the 7 key policies
- lobby prospective candidates
- learn to tweet
- support the NUT "Stand up for Education" campaign
- demand better coverage of education from the BBC
- and much, much more....

Another kind of National Curriculum

Richard Pring

Once again we are seeing changes to the National Curriculum required for all children in schools maintained by local authorities, although not for academies or free schools. Changes there may be, but all changes take on a similar shape. There is a short statement of overall aim, namely, in this case, 'to better prepare pupils for life after school'; there are specific outcomes to be aimed at, reflected in the 'attainment targets'; and there are the means of attaining these targets developed in the detailed 'programmes of study' – helped by the text-books which serve them. The targets have to be so precise that they can be easily measured. And the programmes of study have to be so clear that they can be ticked off by the unexpected visit from the Ofsted inspector. The teacher's job is that of 'delivering' this curriculum. He or she has the technical skills of 'delivery'.

There is a different approach to a 'curriculum'. It was explained by Laurence Stenhouse many years ago as

An attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice.

Let us consider this in detail.

First, with regard to it being an 'educational proposal', it requires more than the rather empty statement 'better preparing pupils for life after school'. It requires an exploration of what is thought to be valuable for young people to know, to feel, to be able to do as they grow as persons. For the philosopher Michael Oakeshott, that was a matter of introducing them to the conversations between the generations of mankind as they come to appreciate the voices of poetry, of literature, of science, of religion, of history. The place of literature, of drama and of poetry enables those learners, through carefully selected books, plays and poetry, to explore the internal and external worlds of the lives and societies in which they are growing up.

Second, therefore, that requires of the teacher a much more active and creative role than one of

'delivering the curriculum', where curriculum is but a detailed programme of what must be done to attain the specific targets. The teacher needs to have the insights into the respective voices in the conversation between the generations, and to communicate those insights to the pupils together with their sense of importance. Hence, as Stenhouse argued, 'there is no curriculum development without teacher development' – without the constant development and critical scrutiny of the relevant knowledge and without an appreciation of what is to be learnt in order that those educational purposes and values might be attained.



Third, a curriculum, to be capable of effective translation into practice, has to have the learners in mind – to respond to the particular contexts in which the learning is to take place. Teaching is a mediation of that which is thought worth learning to the minds, ways of understanding, and feelings of these, not other, learners. Hence, the need for constant, monitoring and adaptation, based on systematic reflection.

Therefore, in the creation and development of the curriculum, teachers must be seen as the thinkers rather than the deliverers, and as those who, within a broad framework, largely determine the content and mode of teaching, adapted to the experiences and modes of understanding of the learners.

To this it might be objected that such a view of the curriculum would entail so many different and sometimes idiosyncratic initiatives – different curricula for different schools. But this need not be so. There could be a broad framework within which teachers would be developing the curriculum, and there would be the constraints of external examinations and of an inspectorate, which hopefully would be able to exercise educational judgement rather than measure targets and tick off the performance indicators.

But, most important, the critical scrutiny referred to above requires greater partnership between schools and between teachers within their respective professional organisations. There are excellent examples from the past where, as in the case of Nuffield Science, teachers together with their partners in the universities, developed the curriculum across the sciences and within each. Teachers within the humanities developed curricula which addressed the learning needs of the pupils, on the one hand, and, on the other, the distinctive modes of knowing of the different subjects. The teachers were and need to be at the centre, not the periphery of the curriculum creation. This was made possible by the creation of teachers centres, places where teachers from different schools could come together to deliberate the aims of education and the contributions which their distinctive subjects could contribute to these aims, and where they could share the problems which affected how their thinking might be implemented in their classrooms.

The adoption of a very different understanding of the curriculum, where aims are reduced to measurable targets delivered by the teachers has impoverished the educational experience of pupils. As one Ofsted report said:

Many teachers spend too much time preparing pupils for the tests in most schools. The whole of the spring term, and often time before and after, is devoted to explicit test preparation, especially to the set Shakespeare tests.

Warwick Mansell, in *Education by Numbers* (2007) describes the effect of the testing regime on the quality of learning, as described by a London school curriculum 14-16 coordinator with reference to Year 9:

Most schools seem to be doing two to three mock tests per child before the real thing. Year 9 is totally dominated by test preparation.

Or again, quoting one of many teachers who said:

I don't feel my Year 9 have learnt anything of value this term. I have done practice reading papers, writing papers, targeted writing for writing papers, and put immense pressure on them.

It is surely important to think again about the curriculum of our schools, not by yet another twist in the same and continuing model of curriculum, but as a cooperative deliberation between schools and their teachers, the various professional organisations, universities, and employers regarding the aims which a curriculum should serve, the quality of learning which should characterise the implementation of the curriculum, how the pupils' learning might be assessed and how the schools should be held to account.

One does not have to look too far back in history to see how that might be done.

Professor Richard Pring is the President of the SEA

Life on the edge of a volcano

Jackie Lukes

What has happened so far, with 'the government's obscure yet revolutionary programme of change for universities' in Professor Simon Szreter's words, and what further upheavals are on the way?

The 1963 Robbins Report extended 1944 principles of a publicly funded system from secondary and further education to higher, and was as politically agreed as the NHS. Its free tuition and maintenance grants scheme lasted till the 1997 Dearing report, implemented by Labour's 1998 Act. This launched upfront means-tested £1000 fees to 'top up' grants. Labour's contentious 2004 Higher Education Act brought in top-up fees of £3000 payable by loans, not upfront. Then Labour commissioned the Browne review.

Its report of October 2010 with its sudden leap from £3375 to £9000 annual fees sent shock waves across higher education in England, sparking student protests. A snap Parliamentary vote was too fast and complicated for anyone to know exactly what was happening and why. Ed Miliband and his team, after initially favouring a graduate tax and 'looking at' £6000 fees, have been silent ever since, 'awaiting the 2015 election'.

The 2011 White Paper 'Putting Students at the Heart of Higher Education' was meant to precede a Higher Education Bill that is still awaited, though there have been three changes to funding schemes announced by regulation, another Parliamentary way to avoid notice and debate. A Bill expected after the 2015 election may be pretty similar whoever forms the next government, unless enough awareness of what is at stake can reach the public world.

The key part of the Browne reform is that fees are not additional to grants, they are instead of grants, both for students and for higher education institutions. Central government's block grant to fund institutions is replaced by income from fees - or rather by the income from the loans meant to pay for the fees. For universities and colleges the shock is that their undergraduate income no longer comes as a direct grant from government; instead it is nominally from students.

In reality, as a 2014 Institute for Fiscal Studies report shows, government-backed loans are built into the scheme as the way of paying the fees (loans repaid over an income threshold of £21,000 at 9% annual interest for a maximum of 30 years

then written off). Moreover 'the non-repayment of loans is built into the system as the Government's contribution to undergraduate funding. Non-repayment of debt is not the exception in this system; it is the norm'. 'The IFS estimates that 73% of graduates will not repay their debt in full, compared to just 25% under the old system'.

That is a huge future bill for government and already it has a big current one. In 2012/13 the Government issued nearly £7.4 billion of student loans, with the loan book estimated to grow from £46 billion to £330 billion between 2013 and 2044. Austerity, deficit? These figures are 'off the books', like PFIs; privately called 'the BIS black hole'.

The roundabout way these loan funds or financial instruments move between government, banks, private equity funds, and back to institutions (much reduced) as 'fees' is arcane: 'many politicians and commentators do not understand the system, nor do academics, students and parents'. The financial packages and new securitizations (bonds) involved are so complex and opaque one expert calls them 'subprime loans' like the subprime mortgages that presaged the 2008 worldwide crash. Both the Institute for Public Policy Research 2013 report on higher education and the Higher Education Commission's report published in November 2014 call this situation 'financially unsustainable' and urge an immediate review of the Browne system before a Higher Education Bill. In effect they're saying, when you're in a (black) hole, stop digging.

The HEC says 'all sides are getting a bad deal'. Government is funding the system indirectly instead of directly in the old ways, thus gaining no public credit. People think students are paying. Students are paying a high price in terms of acute new pressures and a sense of long-term future blight as well as one of intergenerational unfairness with unimaginable consequences. Existing institutions face 'considerable turbulence and volatility [suddenly dependent for income on unpredictable student numbers]... present levels of uncertainty and risk mean that the future financial sustainability of the current funding model is far from guaranteed'.

Where did it all go wrong? The idea, as with school voucher proposals, was that by transferring funds to students you'd achieve 3 things: diversity in provision (in England now vocational technical

courses would be welcome); choice for students taking their voucher to any diverse programme they wanted - consumer not producer power; and a cheaper system for the public purse with no overheads or unwanted supply, just flexible response to demand. The Rand Corporation report on Alum Rock California, the one place that tried school vouchers in the 1970s, found they promoted little diversity, only competitive "homogenization", coincidentally the same word used by SRHE 2013 for the effect of league tables' uniform benchmarks on higher education courses in England. Without diversity in Alum Rock student choice was hardly exercised, they went to the same places as before, whether local or elite. Above all public spending there soared because of the colossally complex administration needed for voucher information and funding systems; hence Sir K's and Mrs T's reluctant dropping of the vouchers idea.

What is happening here now? There is only room for a few findings from my inquiries at different universities in autumn 2014. One is about how management try to improve league table position via the Key Indicators Set of benchmarks which form the rankings; 'gaming the system' and bribery put it mildly. They think league table position informs student choice (plus internet, twitter, snobbism) and are in frantic pursuit of student numbers for income. Hence too the national surge in expenditure on marketing and bought-in outsourced consultants. Academic staff interviews gave cases of 'diktat', 'autocratic' directives, 'Mussolini style corporatism', 'orders' for course cuts, closures and mergers, all for league table benchmarks but all affecting quality and educational matters, with no consultation or even discussion. 'The esprit de corps is gone'. Management with their 'exorbitant salaries' think they are running global corporations and that this is how commercial bosses behave. I was told one V-C has put bullet-proof glass in his office windows.

Another fieldwork finding concerns the struggle that has erupted between students and academic staff over marks. 'I'm paying £9000. Why can't I have top marks'. 'I'm a 2.1 student, I want my papers regraded'. 'The customer is always right'. 'Entitlement' and challenge ('how reliable is your marking system?') were much mentioned. Students have always cared about marks but now see them

as key to their degree, in turn key to the graduate job they need to repay the loan. Some student - consumers feel they are 'buying' both a good degree and a graduate job. As one of the league table benchmarks is '% of 2.1s and 1sts' staff face pressure from management to raise this too. If students now see university narrowly in financial not educational terms, and as a private individual benefit not also a public social one, like V-Cs they only echo the Browne discourse.

What of the immediate future? League tables generate increased stratification between institutions. Recent analysis finds existing stratification intensified, with a high correlation between overall levels of resourcing and each institution's position in the Times League Table. This means increasing polarisation between the best and worst funded places, seeing universities in three tiers: research-intensive, teaching-intensive, and the squeezed middle doing both; colleges are a fourth tier. Those at the bottom face options like those 'of "unviable" hospitals now occurring in the NHS. Late in 2012 the University of Bolton sought... a response to the "imminent financial and sustainability risks" it faced. It offered three basic scenarios: redundancies, do nothing, or seek takeover by another university. One function of this of this instability is to ease the entry of new providers and private equity into the loan-funded sector.'

It seems that planning and thinking for what comes next - the opening up of higher education fully to global market forces - is hidden, undiscussed, underground like the foundations already laid, and subject to the same political cross-party consensus that has characterized this area of policy so far. New Ryanair-model private providers are already starting, such as for-profit Pearson College plc with its degree awarding powers, no teaching other than online, no technical vocational courses only cheap HASS ones, and government-backed student loans. Asset-stripping hedge funds with deep pockets are seen as hovering over financially perilous institutions. It seems that this is the Browne aim: a tiny elite university sector, little or nothing for the rest - and the HE Bill, if it sells the loanbook, will pave the way. Is this what we want?

Jackie Lukes was a lecturer at the University of Hull

Caroline Benn Memorial lecture

11th November

House of Commons

The Golden Age of the Grammar School – Exploding the Myth

by Selina Todd

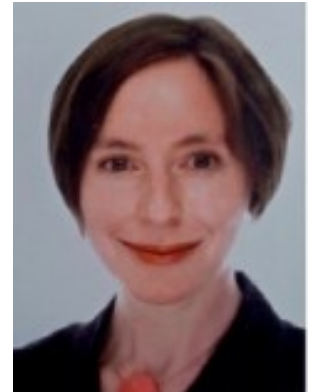
The myth of the grammar school has an extraordinary grip on the education narrative in England. There was a time in the '60's and '70's when grass root revolts in favour of comprehensives seemed to be turning the tide. But it hasn't gone away and there is still a powerful lobby demanding the protection and extension of selection.



Caroline Benn was one of the foremost campaigners for the ending of selection. It was fitting therefore that, in the year after Tony Benn's death, Selina Todd took on and demolished the myth in her Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture promoted by the SEA.

To begin with she reminded us that, in the 1940's, the majority of the workforce it was believed needed only to be trained for routine working class jobs – in Ellen Wilkinson's words "coal has to be mined and fields have to be ploughed". This was an education system designed around the needs of the economy not one intended to develop the talents of the whole population.

Then as now, educational selection was about class. More than half of middle class children got to grammar school but less than one fifth of working class children did so. And once a few working class children got to grammar school, they had to face a conflict between family and community and school which led to many failing to achieve what they could have done.



Grammar schools were rarely sited in working class areas. They expected families to afford innumerable extras. They demanded pupils confined themselves to school led sports and activities and cut themselves off from their communities. Some actively rebelled, more sank into the bottom streams and left early and a few – like Dennis Potter's Nigel Barton – rejected their background with all the trauma that that could lead to.

In the post war years both Labour and Conservative governments put the demands of employers before the aspirations of working class parents and children.

Meanwhile there was a great unmet demand for better education from the rejected in the secondary moderns. These schools were starved of resources and offered very narrow opportunities – with the leaving age at 15, many offered no access to qualifications. The demand for something better was documented by HMI at the time and in the Crowther Report. The result was a demand for comprehensive education in Labour and Tory areas alike, often as a result of public demand which demanded action from nervous politicians.

At the heart of the grammar school myth is the notion that they were a pathway for the "bright" working class child into middle class professions. Implicit in this is that talent is limited and that we need to rescue the talented few because if we don't they be dragged back by the inadequacies of the majority. This is a very convenient myth for the few who made it through 11+ and grammar school. It

says that they deserved their success because they are people of superior ability – most people just aren't up to it!

Just 20% of working class children were offered grammar school places, compared with 50% of middle class children.

Of course the reason some working class kids moved into the middle class is because the labour market was changing – the need for junior managers, technicians, teachers, nurses and so on was growing rapidly in the third quarter of the century. But the really prestigious professions remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the established middle and upper classes – as indeed they do today.

The ambition of the comprehensive movement was to educate every child not just for work but for citizenship and for a full life. It rejected the idea that there is a fixed pool of talent and that the job of schools is to sort people into the right order.

Selina Todd's arguments are developed further in her book *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class, 1910-2010*.

Her analysis of the grammar school myth resonated with the packed committee room in the House of Commons because the battle is far from won. Selection remains a reality in many parts of England. UKIP promises a grammar school in every town and Theresa May signals her support for what would be the first new grammar school in many years in her Maidenhead constituency. And of course covert selection is rampant through much of the country often but not always under the banner of religion.

In the 1950s parents, both middle and working class, were in fact strongly in favour of non-selective education.

The evidence is clear that comprehensives opened many doors that had been shut before. Instead of being held back by comprehensives, many more

children achieved exam success and, helped by the huge expansion of higher education, proved themselves able to succeed at university. We know that selective Kent gets poorer results than comparable comprehensive counties. The international evidence from OECD is equally clear that selection damages achievement.

But still we agonise over our lack of social mobility. There is less of it now because the pool of middle class jobs is not growing as it was in the 60's and 70's and the privileged remain very good at keeping them for their own children.

But more fundamentally focussing on social mobility is asking the wrong question. It is assuming that the kind of inequality we have now is inevitable and the only question is who gets the prizes. But as Ed Miliband said, "This country is too unequal. And we need to change it."

After the lecture, John Cryer MP, chair of the SEA parliamentary group made the same point with huge passion – the issue remains class. Class determined in large measure who got to grammar schools and it still does where that system remains.



But as the number of children living in poverty grows, the inequality between classes continues to constrain the opportunities open to very many children even in comprehensive schools.

An audio version of Selina Todd's lecture is available at

<http://socialisteducationalassociation.org/>

What's happened to the Blunkett Review – and what should happen next?

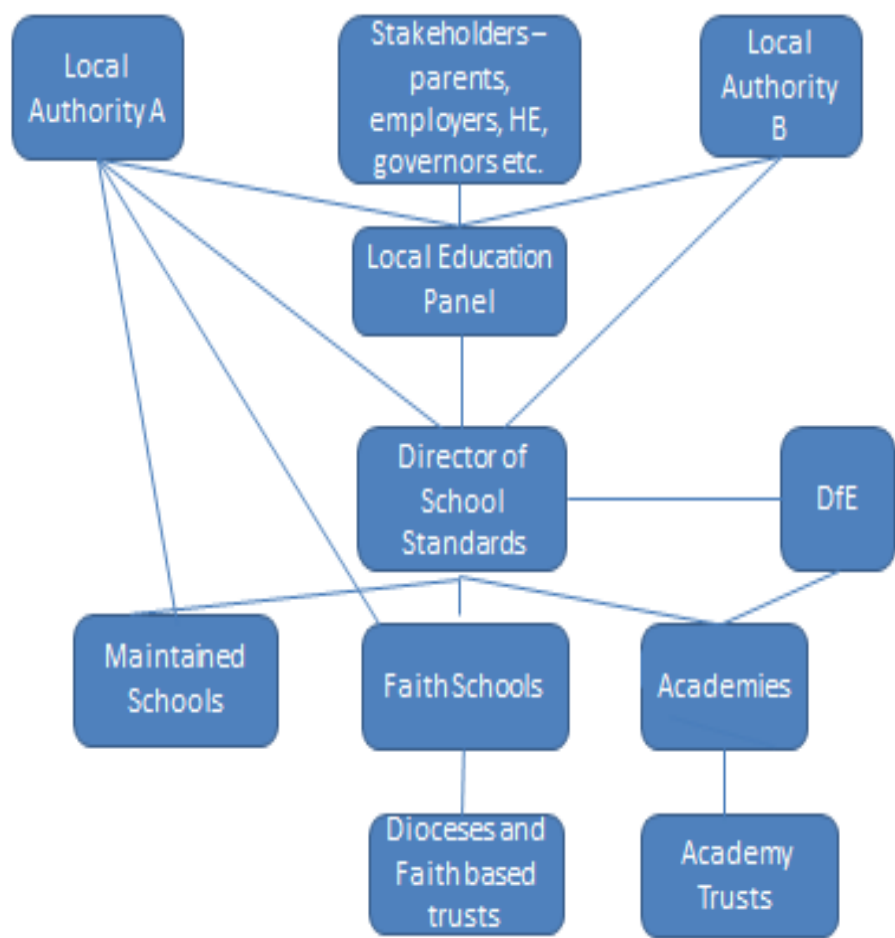
John Bolt

In his recent speech to Comprehensive Future, Tristram Hunt nailed his colours firmly to the commissioner/ provider split for the provision of schools and how they are held accountable. The Director of School Standards is to be the key figure on the commissioning side.

At the same time, it is a commitment that local authorities are to be allowed to open new maintained schools – but they won't have the exclusive right to do this. The commissioner/ provider split means that if local authorities are competing with other providers, they can't be the

commissioner. It then follows that the Director of School Standards, although appointed by local authorities (with some DfE involvement) has to have a level of separation from the local authorities whose bids s/he may be judging. But at the same time, the DSS is only to have a very modest staff so will rely on local authorities for much of the work of planning the demand for places and monitoring school performance.

It's an interesting task then to try and reduce to a diagram what seems to be being proposed. It would look something like this:



Looked at like this, it's pretty clear that this is not a great deal clearer than the hopeless muddle that we have at the moment. Local authorities will have a direct relationship with some schools but not with all. The DfE will continue to have a contractual relationship with some schools but not with all. The DfE is at one and the same time an appointer of and collaborator with local authorities but also will have to judge local authority proposals against others. Disputes won't be handled locally but will end up at the DfE. We will continue to have schools with different budgets, duties and levels of autonomy.

One solution of course would be to return all schools to maintained status. There would be no commissioner/provider split and roles would be clearly and simply defined. But we know this will not happen. The legal complexities would be huge as would be the organisational upheaval and there is clearly no political appetite for this kind of change.

The other way forward is to try to create a commissioner/ provider system which is unambiguous but at the same time reduces the current fragmentation and restores a proper public service ethos to the system. This means asking the heretical question, do we actually need maintained schools?

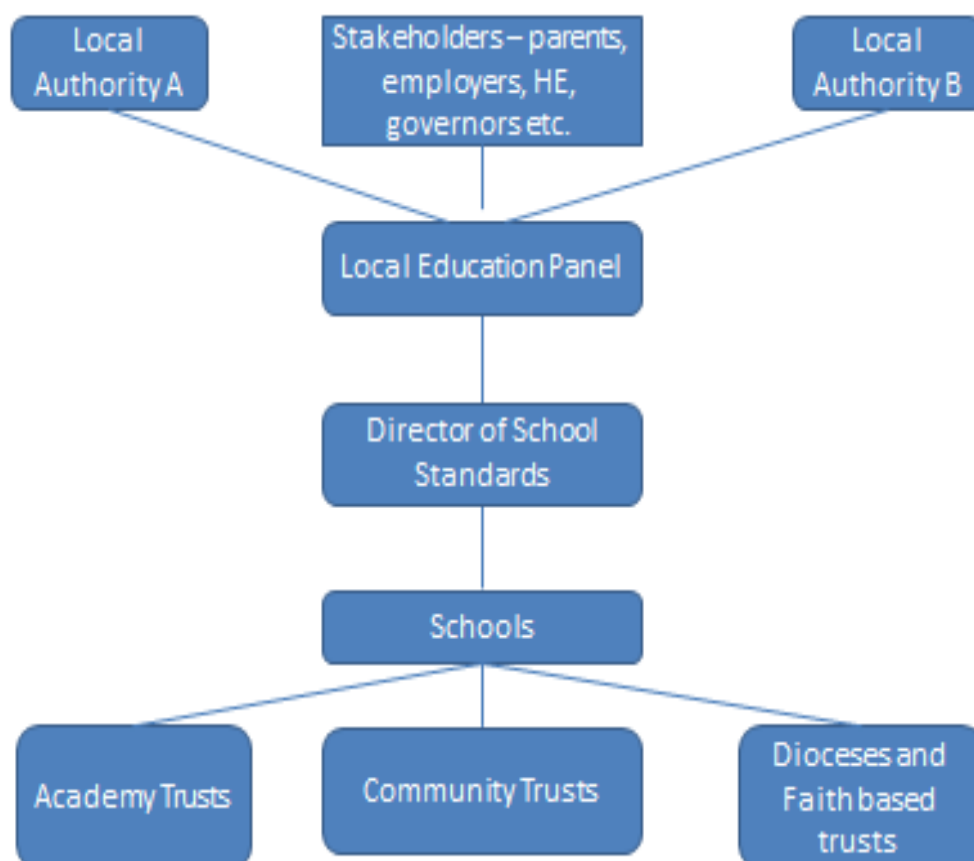
The Blunkett Review, in a little noticed section, floated the idea of maintained schools grouping together into what he called community trusts as an alternative to maintained status. We already also have the co-operative trust model which has become a major feature of the school system in a number of parts of the country.

The key question to be answered is whether having a mixed economy of maintained schools and academies and one in which local authorities compete with other providers has any merit. I would argue that it doesn't and that it actually gets in the way of local authorities doing their real jobs.

In summary these are:

- To represent the interests of their communities
- To plan provision in the best interests of the whole community
- To promote co-ordination and collaboration
- To monitor performance and take corrective action when needed.

None of these are actually dependent on the current model of maintained schools. So you could have a much tidier system that looks like this:





In this structure roles are clear and lines of accountability, ultimately to local communities are clear. There are no mixed messages and the DSS can act on behalf of and be accountable to local authorities with no conflicts of interest getting in the way.

This would not of itself restore equity and coherence to the system. Nor would it guarantee that public service values would replace the creeping privatisation that we are now seeing. We would need actions along these lines:

- No governor or trustee permitted to have any financial dealings with the school.
- All schools to have their own governing bodies with full powers
- No distinction between funding for different kinds of school and all schools to have budgets directly allocated to them not to a chain or trust.
- A common set of regulations applies to all schools
- Schools free to join or leave any trust with the agreement of the DSS.
- Academy contracts managed by the DSS not the DfE or the EFA
- Public sector standards of transparency to apply to all organisations involved in the management, governance and oversight of state funded schools.

You would then soon see how many current sponsors are in the business to genuinely enhance the quality of education rather than for personal aggrandizement or back door profit. And you would also find whether schools think their sponsors actually add any value or not. The role of the DSS

would become clear as would their accountability to their local community and to elected representatives:

Role and powers of the DSS (to be exercised with the agreement of the Local Education Panel :

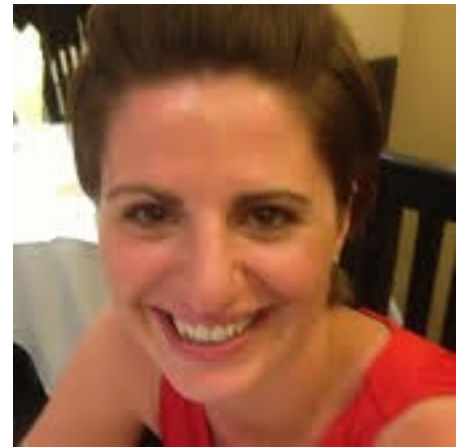
- Ensure there are adequate school places, commissioning new schools and closing or changing schools as necessary and after full consultation.
- Ensure a fair and consistent admissions system.
- Monitor the performance of all schools and their compliance with law and regulations.
- Promote collaboration between schools.
- Intervene when monitoring shows this to be necessary.
- Control the resources needed to undertake these roles.

Labour's approach to all of these issues has not really advanced since Blunkett's review was published. Devolution has become the absolute flavour of the month since the Scottish referendum but education has been strangely absent from the debate about returning real power to localities. This isn't an issue that can go on being ignored. Without some clear and radical thinking there is every danger that the current muddle will be replaced by something that is no real improvement.

John Bolt is General Secretary of the SEA

Why I Tweet

Emma Ann Hardy



When I was asked to write this it was suggested that I record how many times each day I tweet and to be honest I didn't dare look. Instead I can tell you that I have now sent over thirty-two thousand tweets in less than three years which equates to a worrying twenty nine tweets daily.

It is no exaggeration to say that being involved in twitter has changed my life and it is difficult to imagine it not being there. People ask me how I have time to do it but it's an unacknowledged part of my everyday life, make a cup of tea and check twitter, wait for a bus and check twitter.

Before 2011 I was not an activist in either the NUT or the Labour Party, in fact I had resigned my Labour party membership a number of years previously and I had never been an activist before. The appalling damage this government has done to my country has radicalised me and twitter has given me the opportunity to vent this, to link with likeminded people, to contact those with the power to change things and in a small way to be the mosquito in the room. Where twitter is the most powerful is in the way it equalises people, whoever you are in real life, on twitter you are just another tweeter whose views and actions can be challenged and questioned. It also allows you to forge connections with people you would have no opportunity of meeting in real life. I am 'just' a part time infant teacher from the East Riding of Yorkshire and in my day to day interactions I have zero opportunity to chat to, for example, Ian Mearns MP, Sean Harford, Elizabeth Truss MP or Jonathan Simons about my opinions on education. Why shouldn't all these people listen to practising teachers from small primary schools in the north?

I am not going to pretend that my views are always agreed with but being on twitter makes you part of the debate. Following online interactions, I've been invited to meet some of the 'great and the good' in education and some of these discussions have resulted in real changes. Twitter is not everything and it's worth remembering not to place too high a regard on the twitter 'bubble.' Nothing beats face to face discussions but the reason many politicians, other teachers and trade unionists know I exist is because of twitter.

There is a current tension because of the way, for example, the DfE are going directly to teachers on twitter to ask them for individual feedback on the

workload survey instead of just the trade unions and we have to be careful not to assume that twitter is representative of the teaching population. As a trade unionist I'd argue that nothing should replace the trade unions as the elected and democratic voice of the profession.

There are times that I will deliberately log on to participate in the many twitter discussions happening (plug for #NUTchat on Sunday nights at 6pm) and this is a fantastic opportunity to steal and share ideas with other practitioners. Many teachers have described twitter as being the friendliest virtual staff room where everyone is keen to help and support each other, one teacher on twitter once sent me an entire unit of planning for a new history topic. The people I follow can be divided into different camps, teachers who tweet about pedagogy, Labour or trade union activists and some, like me, who fit into every category!

During a recent NUT event everyone in the room was asked to introduce themselves and give their position, of course I have no position in the NUT and as the introductions continued I became more and more aware of this. A couple of weeks ago I was informed that I had no influence other than virtual presence and basically to know my place, I am very aware of what I am and what I am not. I am a teacher and activist who tweets. However, through twitter I have met the most amazing people, one being Debra Kidd with whom I went on to organise the national education conference Northern Rock. This was attended by five hundred teachers and only advertised through social media and because we enjoyed it so much we are planning another on June 13th next year! (@NRocks2015)

Tweeting on its own will not change anything. When I share the music I'm listening to in the morning or pictures of my children at a local museum I am under no illusion that this will change the world, nor when I rage against the latest nonsense from this coalition government, but, twitter can help build a movement for change and put me in contact with people who can.



Education Politics

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Forthcoming events

10th January, 1.00pm, Birmingham: SEA NEC

7th February, London, TUC South and East Region Education Conference

7th March, Manchester: 11.00am. SEA NEC;

1.00pm, all member Policy Forum

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The articles reflect the views of their authors and not the SEA unless indicated otherwise.

Editor: Martin Johnson (anothermartinjohnson@gmail.com)