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Editorial

For socialists it's like August 1914. Then, how do we react to a war between capitalist factions. Now, what do we say about a war amongst Tories. At least, that's the diet from the mainstream media, with other parties and interests finding it hard to get attention. And the electorate? The disillusionment with politicians grows as yet again we do not get presented with 'the facts' and the big issues to help us make a decision on membership of the EU. Recently the Shadow Chancellor has shown the way by setting out the reforms Labour would seek within the EU, reforms in favour of working people. Maybe, just maybe, such fresh thinking will get an airing before 23 June.

Obfuscation rules in domestic policy as well. The government is presiding over a descent into chaos in England's schools and colleges with highly muted curiosity from the media. Perhaps the crisis needs to become full-blown before notice is taken, and perhaps the numbers of children without school places or of classes without teachers will not reach critical mass next autumn.

One policy area that will not wash with the public is the curriculum and qualifications crisis. Nick Gibb scratches his head; he *knows* he is right, and everyone else is wrong, but somehow people just don't get it. However much we may laugh at him to stop ourselves crying, England's schoolchildren and their teachers can't laugh, faced with the insane demands of grammar tests and the rest. For the public, wry comments about exclamation marks must be accompanied by wonderment at the kind of government that can do this.

We cannot expect England's schoolchildren or their parents to be unduly concerned about the Prime Minister's decision to go with the total academisation of schools. As we know, in itself academy status makes no difference to a school from the point of view of the parents until they have a problem and find they have no-one to turn to, so don't expect them on the streets about it.

As argued in EP 126, implementation of this will lay quite open the necessity of a tier of administration between school and Whitehall and the failure of government efforts to fill the gap. With Sir Michael Wilshaw getting his revenge for not being kept on for a second term, pesky campaigners demanding information that is very inconvenient to provide, and those performance tables which the Tories used to love, the preferred solution of the Multi-Academy Trusts looks more like a train running into the buffers.

After all, even the government's own statisticians could only find three chains whose data could be made to suggest they are effective. And as SEA General Secretary John Bolt has pointed out, the lie that a new national funding formula will passport 'fair funding' straight from Whitehall to school will be exposed as MATs get the money for their schools and do what they like with it - which is, of course, to pay their CEOs at immoral levels.

The forthcoming debates on the Bill will expose just how the government intends the current statutory duties of local authorities to be carried out and how these duties are to be funded. One area that will be exposed is the failure to provide for real school improvement by means of effective professional development of staff. The myth of the 'self-improving school system', which is regularly debunked in numerous OECD publications, is set to join MATs in the pile-up. We know that many teachers are now entering the profession with inadequate School Direct training and will require plenty of support to become effective in a variety of settings but where is that to come from?

The OECD also regularly points to the necessity for education systems to be clear about their purpose, so as to inform their curriculum, assessment and accountability models. That is precisely what the House of Commons Education Select Committee intends to do. This edition is almost completely devoted to the submissions from 180 individuals and organisations on the purpose and quality of education. Many (certainly within SEA!) believe that the SEA submission is outstanding, and it is reprinted in full.

This inquiry will sort out those in power who have no vision for what they are trying to achieve. The HMCi was embarrassingly vacuous when giving oral evidence, and ministers will no doubt fare little better. Socialists are in no doubt: while we may not agree on all the detail, we believe in a comprehensive curriculum in a comprehensive school system. We believe that education is a social good and that schools are a community asset, requiring democratic accountability. They can be an engine of social cohesion, and they must inculcate moral purpose and responsibility. We want opportunities for lifelong learning.

There were few avowedly socialist submissions, but widespread support for these propositions. The task for the SEA, as argued by Paul Martin on p18, is to put some clothes on these principles and provide the Opposition with some positive messages to add to their attacks on Tory nonsense.

The purpose of education: a commentary

The Education Select Committee of the House of Commons has attempted a very large bite in launching an investigation into the purpose and quality of education. Significantly, the Chair of the Committee Neil Carmichael MP said, '...we want over this Parliament to explore the fundamentals of education in England. Approaching this basic question of the purpose of education will pave the way for the Committee to examine whether our curriculum, qualifications, assessment and accountability systems really are fit for purpose.' This sequence was endorsed by a large number of submissions, some of which were clearly doubtful that assessment was likely to be reformed to reflect purpose.

The SEA submission is on p3-5. Then follows a commentary (p6-10) which highlights some of the themes which resonate most with socialist educationists, with illustrative excerpts from the 180 submissions. Finally, three further submissions are printed in full (p11-15).

The purpose of education: the SEA submission

3.1 SEA welcomes the decision of the committee to launch this enquiry. We believe that it is essential that the design of the education system must be informed by the identification of what the system is intended to achieve. For too long this has not been the case in England. Moreover we believe that we need a statement of purposes which has been created through a widespread process of consultation and debate and is based on a broad and cross party consensus. It should not be imposed by any one Secretary of State or one political party. The select committee enquiry should perhaps be seen as the beginning of a much wider process through which a genuine national consensus could be reached.

3.2 We welcome too the intention of the committee to go on to explore the measures that could be used to determine how well current provision meets the identified aims and purposes. For some time there has been a tendency to value only what can be easily (albeit often superficially and with dubious accuracy) be measured rather than asking the harder question "how can we measure what we really value?"

4.1 SEA would draw the attention of the committee to significant work that has sought to address this issue on the basis of widespread consultation with the profession and with many other groups with an interest in education. This includes:

The Cambridge Primary Review, "Children, their World, their Education" led by Robin Alexander.

The Nuffield Review of 14 to 19 Education and Training led by Richard Pring

Learning through Life, the report of the independent Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning led by Tom Schuller and David Watson.

The conclusions of this and other work were brought together by Richard Pring and Andrew Pollard in "Education for All: Evidence from the past, principles for the future".

4.2 The case for a broad approach to defining the purposes of education has been made by many. They were at the centre of the "Every Child Matters" programme. These include the CBI which has been forthright in defining the kinds of skills and qualities it considers young people need in the modern workplace. Scotland has identified four core aims for its education system. It seeks to develop successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. In England a range of educational groups have developed frameworks that go beyond simply the achievement of academic qualifications. For example Whole Education states that "we believe that all children deserve an engaging and rounded education that supports academic achievement, but also develops the skills, knowledge and qualities needed to flourish in life, learning and work."

4.3 It is also the case that many of the highest performing educational systems, including those in Asia that are so often held up as models, are recognising the need for an approach which embraces a wide range of knowledge, skills and qualities.

5.1 SEA would argue that there are two essential strands to the aims of education in our society. First we

The purpose of education: the SEA submission (cont)

must enable young people to ensure their personal wellbeing – this includes physical and mental health, social and emotional well-being including friendships and relationships, personal autonomy and creativity and the practical aspects of life including managing money, entering employment and living independently.

5.2 Secondly, we should educate children so that they can take their place in the society of the future. But more than that, we want them to be able to make an active contribution to that society and to bring to it a critical and questioning approach. We want young people to be prepared to contribute to the economic, social, political and cultural life of our diverse and democratic society.

5.3 If they are going to be able to achieve these core aims, young people will need to develop to age appropriate degrees:

- mastery of key skills including literacy, numeracy and the ability to engage with the digital world;
- important areas of knowledge – including a grounding in science and scientific method, an understanding of how human society is organised, has evolved and interacts with the physical environment and the creative and artistic achievements of people now and in the past;
- moral and ethical understanding which enables them to develop values which underpins their personal life, their relationships and their role in society and which are consistent with the values of our society as a whole;
- an understanding of and the ability to view critically the key characteristics of British and global society including the values of democracy and social justice, respecting diversity, the world of work and the challenges of sustainability;
- physical, practical and technical capability in a wide range of contexts;
- the opportunity to develop their own creativity;
- highly developed skills such as oral and communication skills, the ability to analyse and solve problems, to empathise with and work collaboratively with others and to understand and meet appropriate expectations;

- to know about the opportunities open to them both in education and employment and to understand how they can access them;
- the motivation and ability to go on learning throughout life and to meet the challenges posed by an age of rapid change and longer life expectancy.

5.4 It will be seen that these objectives go far beyond simply the transmission of knowledge. We believe that all young people need the opportunity to engage with all of these areas throughout their education. This includes young people with disabilities who should have access to the full range of opportunities wherever possible alongside their peers.

6.1 In defining the purposes of education in England, we also need to consider the part that education can play in addressing the profound inequalities that are to be found in our society. It is naïve to imagine that education alone can provide genuinely equal opportunities in a society where there are such severe inequalities in areas such as income, work opportunities, health and housing. But it must be an aim of the education service as a whole to do what it can to support disadvantaged young people and to reduce the differences in outcomes between them and those who are more favoured. This is not simply a matter of what and how children are taught. It involves addressing issues such as

- a school admissions system that is promoting increased social and economic segregation
- the survival of selection at 11 which denies opportunities to many
- the fragmentation of the school system.
- ensuring that resourcing is adequate and deployed according to needs
- restoring pre-school support for disadvantaged families such as Sure Start
- protecting opportunities for students who need “a second chance” for example through further education
- properly valuing practical and vocational learning
- providing comprehensive and expert careers advice and guidance.

The purpose of education: the SEA submission (cont)

We would argue that current policies are failing to promote greater equality in all of these areas. The gap between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and not disadvantaged pupils at GCSE has increased in the last two years.

6.2 As our society becomes more diverse, it is essential that education makes the greatest possible contribution to the development of community cohesion. Unfortunately in this area too, the education system is doing the opposite of what is required. This has been documented for some time, for example in the Cantle Report of 2001 concerning the riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Schools are becoming increasingly segregated by class, ethnicity and faith. There is clear evidence that this increasing segregation is associated with the fragmentation of the school system. It is argued by some that this is appropriate because it reflects parental choice. There must come a time, however, when government should give greater priority to the needs of society as a whole.

6.3 The evidence of increasing disaffection amongst significant parts of our population should not be ignored. This is not an issue purely about ethnic minorities. It underpins underachievement amongst parts of the white British population in particular. Countering it will require a broad strategy across all areas of government but any analysis of the purposes of education must take account of the need to give all young people the opportunity to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

7.1 The committee asks how we can measure how well the purposes of education are being met. The first answer is that the current accountability regime based on narrow measures of academic achievement is not enough. The second is that expectations need to be realistic. Too often ministers and indeed inspectors have simply blamed schools because they have not successfully overcome the profound inequalities in our society. This is not about excusing genuinely poor performance. But it is about recognising the challenging context that many schools and young people work in.

7.2 Neither pupil performance data nor snapshot inspections lasting only a couple of days can provide an adequate measure of the effectiveness of either individual schools or of the system as a whole across the whole range of purposes as defined above.

7.3 The first stage, once an agreed national statement of aims has been developed, will be to define what success looks like in all areas. In some cases there will be an answer that can be expressed through data. But in many others judgements will need to be made against a set of descriptors which will define the knowledge, skills and qualities needed by a well-educated young person. To make those judgements, a range of techniques will be needed – for example observations, student and staff focus groups and evidence from other stakeholders including parents, employers, colleges and universities.

7.4 The statement of purposes will be the starting point for the definition of an educational entitlement. All schools and colleges – and indeed all organisations concerned with education from the DfE downwards – should be expected to explain how they set out to achieve these aims for all students. A framework of self and peer assessment could be established to consider how effective schools are in meeting these aims. The role of the national inspectorate should be to ensure that these assessments are consistent across the country, to identify areas where improvement is required and where there is particularly good practice. National inspectors should work in partnership with local evaluation arrangements not in isolation from them. It will clearly be inappropriate to reduce school performance across such a wide range of objectives to a single numerical grade.

7.5 Evaluating the effectiveness of the system as a whole will partly be a matter of aggregating individual school assessments. But it will also be possible to get feedback at a national level from stakeholders, through thematic inspections and testing undertaken by a sample of pupils across the country. The crucial point is that aims should be defined first and evaluation systems then designed to properly measure how far those aims have been achieved.

The purpose of education - a commentary

Neil Carmichael said at the launch of the inquiry, 'We can expect to hear diverse answers...', but the striking feature of the submissions is their overwhelming consensus. As Joshua Forstenzer pointed out (submission 0106),

In the history of philosophy, we find three broad ways of conceiving the aims of education: (a) education for the sake of the continuation of society (sometimes with an emphasis on economic flourishing); (b) education for the sake of the individuals' personal autonomy (as found in the traditions of liberal education articulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and John Dewey); and (c) education for its own sake (education is good in itself, regardless of further aims).

Almost all submissions expressed in different ways, and with different emphases, the liberal orthodoxy which dominated the British debate on philosophy of education during the 20th century. Where was what Mary Bousted has called 'the new blob'? Just two submissions espoused versions of the 'powerful knowledge' thesis espoused by Nick Gibb which forms the basis of current curriculum and qualifications policy. The massed ranks of the Teach First brigade apparently have nothing to say about the really big questions, despite their usual eagerness to adopt the role of the expert. No, the most valuable contributions came from the Professors, long in the tooth, as well as some from unlikely sources. Indeed, often the Committee was referred to previous work, particularly the Nuffield and Cambridge Reviews referenced by SEA. And the most disappointing? The DfE and its agents, Ofsted, and Ofqual, loyally repeated Gibbisms which appeared shallow and out of touch.

The Nuffield Review

Although there was no submission from the Nuffield Review, its summary of the final report, Education for All: The future of education and training for 14-19 year olds, published in 2009, stated:

One criticism of policy, frequently met during the course of the Review, was that there have been too many fragmented and disconnected interventions by government which do not cohere in some overall sense of purpose. There is a need in policy, and in the provision and practice of education, for a clear vision of what all these interventions and investments of money and effort are for. What is the overall purpose?

The Review addressed this concern from the beginning. It was, therefore, shaped throughout by the answers to the following question: What counts as an educated 19 year old in this day and age?

Values shape all that we do and decide, not least in education...

The Review, therefore, argued for an understanding of education for all which would provide:

- *the knowledge and understanding required for the 'intelligent management of life';*
- *competence to make decisions about the future in the light of changing economic and social conditions;*
- *practical capability – including preparation for employment;*
- *moral seriousness with which to shape future choices and relationships;*
- *a sense of responsibility for the community.*

Such knowledge, capability and qualities are potentially important for, and (in different degrees) accessible to, all young people, irrespective of social, religious and cultural background. All learners will have to become more rounded, resilient, creative and social, if they are to help shape an increasingly unpredictable and demanding world. Therefore, what matters, as argued in the Review, is how these essential knowledge, capabilities and qualities are translated into the learning experience of young people, into the curriculum, into the role and training of teachers, into the 'indicators' by which schools and colleges are judged, into the qualifications framework, and into further training, employment or higher education...

The Review made five over-arching demands (and 31 recommendations) including:

- *The re-assertion of a broader vision of education in which there is a profound respect for the whole person...*
- *System performance indicators 'fit for purpose', in which the 'measures of success' reflect this range of educational aims...*

The Cambridge Primary Review

The submission by Robin Alexander for the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (0088), which continues the work of the Review also published in 2009, states:

Find the submissions at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/purpose-quality-education-england-15-16/publications/>

1 *The Review's exploration of educational aims appears in chapter 12 of the final report. It followed discussion with a wide range of stakeholders, a comparative analysis of the stated aims of other education systems and a historical check on the evolving aims of public education in England since the nineteenth century. This revealed remarkable continuity in educational sentiment but also a tendency for public statements of aims to bear little relation to the purposes manifested by other policies, especially on the curriculum. Indeed, it can readily be demonstrated that official statements of educational aims tend to be largely decorative...*

Examples of this decoration are found in submissions from Clive Belgeonne (0140) and the Design and Technology Association (0172) which quote from earlier versions of the National Curriculum:

I think the National Curriculum that was published in 1999 provided a useful overview to the purpose of education in the 'Values and purposes underpinning the school curriculum' (DfES 1999 p10):

Education influences and reflects the values of society, and the kind of society we want to be. It is important, therefore, to recognise a broad set of common values and purposes that underpin the school curriculum and the work of schools.

Foremost is a belief in education, at home and at school, as a route to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, physical and mental development, and thus the well-being, of the individual. Education is also a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy, and sustainable development. Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to these ends. These include valuing ourselves, our families and other relationships, the wider groups to which we belong, the diversity in our society and the environment in which we live. Education should also reaffirm our commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty.

At the same time, education must enable us to respond positively to the opportunities and challenges of the rapidly changing world in which we live and work. In particular, we need to be prepared to engage as individuals, parents, workers and citizens with economic, social and cultural change, including the continued globalisation of the economy and society, with new work and leisure patterns and with the rapid expansion of communication technologies.

And

...Statutory Requirements for key stages 3-4 (2008) provide a definition which many would subscribe to:

2.2 "Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to personal development and equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy and sustainable development.

These include values relating to:

the self, ...

relationships, ...

our society, ...

the environment,

At the same time, education must enable us to respond positively to the opportunities and challenges of the rapidly changing world in which we live and work. In particular, we need to be prepared to engage as individuals, workers and citizens with economic, social and cultural change, including the continued globalisation of the economy and society, with new work and leisure patterns and with the rapid expansion of communications technologies."

2.3 It goes on to state that the aims of the curriculum should be to:

"...enable all young people to become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society."

As Alexander argues, such statements are not reflected in the curriculum as taught and assessed in our schools. He then repeats the Cambridge Review version of the aims of education:

11... These aims arose from an enquiry into primary education. Mindful of the Committee's interest in the education of children of all ages, we mention that we have been frequently told that they apply no less to early years education and the secondary phase. It is in that spirit that we commend them for the Committee's consideration.

THE INDIVIDUAL

- 1. Well-being.*
- 2. Engagement.*
- 3. Empowerment.*
- 4. Autonomy.*

The purpose of education - a commentary (cont)

SELF, OTHERS AND THE WIDER WORLD

5. Encouraging respect and reciprocity.
6. Promoting interdependence and sustainability.
7. Empowering local, national and global citizenship.
8. Celebrating culture and community.

LEARNING, KNOWING AND DOING

9. Exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense. To enable children to encounter and begin to explore: intellectual, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, social, emotional and physical; through language, mathematics, science, the humanities, the arts, religion and other ways of knowing and understanding.

10. Fostering skill.

11. Exciting the imagination.

12. Enacting dialogue.

The liberal consensus

The degree of liberal consensus is illustrated by submissions from the Catholic Education Service (0100) and the CBI (0171):

We believe that education, from a Catholic perspective, has a number of purposes:

It is to assist in the formation of the whole person: intellectual, moral, emotional, physical, spiritual.

It is to help pupils to flourish in every sense – for them to be healthy, happy, fulfilled, independent, well-rounded, informed, skilled human beings.

It is to help them to become active and thoughtful citizens – not just “cogs in the economic machine” but critical, engaged citizens in a properly functioning democracy.

It is to help pupils discern their vocation – what is their purpose in life? How can they use their gifts in the service of the greater good?

It is to assist them in taking the next steps in their chosen life journey – into further education or employment and to ensure they have the necessary qualifications, skills and character necessary to make success possible.

And:

Employers are clear that a successful education system is one which supports the holistic development of young people. This means supporting young people to develop the attitudes and behaviours that will set them on the pathway to success – such as resilience, determination and creativity – in addition the core

knowledge and skills needed for different career pathways.

The CBI sets out in more detail what these behaviours are and how they can be demonstrated in practice and comments: *While these characteristics can clearly be developed through extra-curricular activities and interaction with employers, what we really need is to see them embedded within the overall ethos of the school. This broader development should come as a part of learning in all subjects and as something that all pupils experience, as opposed to something that is seen as an ‘optional add-on’ or that happens on one-off occasions.* It goes on to discuss how to assess these qualities and make schools accountable for them.

Most of the submissions focus on curriculum: what is to be taught to meet the defined purposes. Yet in England's schools today, the assessment regime drives what is taught. The submission from NfER (the National Foundation for Educational Research) (0137) makes their key recommendation:

...if, as a society, we expect our education system to deliver more than purely academic achievement, then we should be investing in higher quality, formal measurement of these other objectives.

It goes on to list five principles of good measurement:

- a. *What we measure should reflect what we value.*
- b. *Measurement should avoid creating perverse incentives*
- c. *Measurement should recognise the achievements of different groups of young people.*
- d. *Measurement should be technically sound.*
- e. *Measurement should be used to drive improvement.*

Doing and Making

A key question for the SEA must be, is there a distinctively socialist curriculum which reflects distinctively socialist purposes of education? It can be argued that the current academic diet is only a continuation of that considered suitable for the administrative class in the 1800s – indeed, that is another way of expressing the ‘powerful knowledge’ concept. A more rounded curriculum and assessment model should include a stress on more practical pursuits. This is supported by a number of submissions. Interestingly Keith Budge, the head of the progressive independent school Bedales (0040) states: *Our overriding objective is to: ‘to develop inquisitive thinkers with a love of learning who cherish independent*

The purpose of education - a commentary (cont)

'thought' and 'to enable students' talents to develop through doing and making'... We want [our students] to enjoy school, whilst seeking to prepare them for life beyond school (whatever that may hold). Doing and making are key to this. For example, our students get involved in building projects, making ponds, planting trees, cookery and dealing with livestock...

Unsurprisingly the Design and Technology Association supports this approach. The charity Edge Foundation (0037) makes the argument:

In this submission, the Edge Foundation provides a brief historical perspective to show that Ministers have increasingly taken it upon themselves to determine the purpose and content of compulsory education, without due regard for the views of parents, young people, teachers, employers and others with a legitimate interest...

Edge proposes the following definition of the purpose of compulsory education:

Compulsory education imparts and encourages knowledge, skills, dispositions and habits of mind which enable young people to go on to live responsible and rewarding adult lives within their close circle of family and friends, their local community, the economy and the wider world.

We go on to argue that the current national curriculum is largely knowledge-based. Knowledge is essential to success in life, but it is not enough on its own. In our view, all young people should experience learning by doing throughout their time in compulsory education. In Key Stage 4, young people should be entitled to choose practical and technical subjects as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. From 16, they should be able to specialise in technical and vocational learning. Assessments should include practical tasks as well as written or online exams.

Edge develops its argument:

...learning by doing both requires and develops valuable cognitive skills. In "Bodies of Knowledge" (a report commissioned by Edge), Caxton, Lucas and Webster argue that learning to do something involves (in varying degrees) the skills to investigate and experiment, and the ability to apply reasoning and imagination (eg work out solutions to problems, or imagine what a prototype will look like when it is finished). Successful learning by doing requires and

promotes curiosity, determination, resourcefulness, sociability and a capacity for reflection. These dispositions and habits of mind are extremely valuable in adult life.

In addition, learning by doing adds context, purpose and authenticity to education. It helps young people understand not just what they need to know, but why. It also helps them explore and understand their talents, abilities and aspirations, so that they can make better-informed decisions at key points in their education.

Learning by doing also helps connect the classroom to the wider world. Using the same examples as before, young people can read a play in the classroom, perform it in the school hall and see it performed in a theatre. They can assemble a motor in the classroom, and see them assembled in factories.

Lest there be any doubt about it, we believe learning by doing should be part of compulsory education for all young people. Young people need to test and deepen their knowledge by applying it to a variety of problems and contexts, both cerebral and physical. In so doing, they will develop social and physical skills, personal dispositions and habits of mind which prepare them for further learning and autonomous adult life.

In short, learning by doing is as important as learning by listening and reading. However, this is not sufficiently reflected in the national curriculum, while the EBacc places an even greater premium on knowledge over skills.

In our view, all young people should experience learning by doing throughout their time in compulsory education. In Key Stage 4, young people should be entitled to choose practical and technical subjects as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. From 16, they should be able to specialise in technical and vocational learning. Assessments should include practical tasks as well as written or online exams.

This is not about sorting the academic sheep from the vocational goats. It is about providing breadth of educational opportunities, demonstrating the practical application of knowledge, and developing (some of) the skills and dispositions involved in making and doing things. Finally – and we have deliberately left this till last – it is also about helping young people appreciate that the world of work requires people with diverse skills and abilities, not just the talent to pass a written exam.

The purpose of education - a commentary (cont)

A comprehensive curriculum

Edge raises a second theme which is central to a socialist view of the purposes of education, what may be called the principle of comprehensive access to curriculum. It is true that the government seems to claim that a very partial academic offer is right for all but the consensus of the submissions that it is not right for anyone. A comprehensive curriculum must provide a breadth of experience, including the practical, for all young people at all stages of their schooling. Many of the submissions are clear about the need for a broad curriculum, but evade the question of its comprehensive coverage, both across the ability range and across the years. This principle constitutes a rejection of the idea of 'academic' and 'vocational' routes in upper secondary curriculum, but this question receives little explicit attention in the submissions.

The community

A third theme for socialists is the vision of education as more than a service for individual young people. As the Church of England Education Office puts it (0129), *'The Church of England discussion paper, Fruits of the Spirit, highlighted that good education acknowledges the significance of the "web of relationships that characterize schools, including relationships with children, parents and the wider community." Education is a broad social good that enriches whole communities.'*

The British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology develops this argument (0022):

4. The importance of whole school systems

4.1. *The purpose of education cannot be separated from the community in which it is located. Although community can be described as an administrative or geographical area, it is more relevant to consider a community as having a shared purpose and interest, which in relation to schools is the education of all children and young people. Strong communities are connected communities, where people feel that they belong, are valued and their contribution is facilitated. Alongside this are predominantly psychological dimensions of a sense of belonging and interdependence between members of the school. Inclusive, strong, school communities are those where there is a shared vision and purpose that gives meaning and motivation to all students. Signs of well-*

being are embedded in social structures - how people perceive and relate to each other, the extent of trust between people, whether there is a shared understanding of how they should behave toward and care for one another. Students are more likely to engage in healthy behaviours and succeed academically when they feel connected to school and community. Research has demonstrated a strong relationship between feelings of connectedness and educational outcomes, including school attendance, staying in school longer and higher attainment. All this underlines the importance of establishing and supporting a school environment that promotes positive opportunities for collaboration to attain mutual goals. Well functioning schools can provide social and psychological support within their learning environment.

Of course, this social purpose is completely absent from market theorists' views of the purpose of education, and is a necessary element to be reinserted into Labour education thinking.

Lastly, two submissions include a purpose which has been almost completely absent for a long time. See Gabor Valter (0151) on p11 and the South West Learning for Sustainability Coalition (0120), a group of over 130 organisations and individuals committed to, well, learning for sustainability. It argues:

Formal education has several purposes – trying to over-simplify its role risks underplaying the importance of some aspects. That said, we outline some key purposes here, grouped into four categories. The first are based on the work of Biesta (2009), which we paraphrase as:

- (a) *Qualification – knowledge that society wants or needs us to have;*
- (b) *Socialisation – learning how our world works socially, culturally and physically;*
- (c) *Subjectification – developing our own identity and our response to the world, including to categories above;*

To this we add: (d) Transformation – learning to promote or bring about change towards a better world (see Sterling 2001).

Spot the difference? Socialists once argued openly that education should be a means to transforming society. Is that something we should support? Something we agree with but don't want to talk about? Or is it old hat?

Master Gabor Valter (0151)

What I think the purpose of, in no way is an analysis of the current education system of England and Wales, rather a strong critical alternative vision grounded in critical pedagogy.

I think the purpose of education is one of transformation. It is to transform society through a radically critical, revolutionary process that engages its educands. Education is nurture and care and it has only as much to do with the labour market and the economy as it should have to; indeed very little at all. Because the purpose of education is not ensuring the functioning of a segmented, unjust society, where all social transactions and interactions are commodified into a system controlled by an increasingly small minority. Rather, the purpose of education is to empower both oppressed and oppressor to regain their humanity through systematic analysis of their own thinking, positions, interactions, contexts, etc.

In such education, educators are critical intellectuals who are willing and active in struggle(s) against oppression and who also, in the beginning of their journey recognise their own position within a system designed to maintain social cohesion while enhancing and entrenching social stratification.

In such education, educators build on knowledge of the learners by engaging on a journey of discovery, of questioning. Educators help learners analyse their understanding of the world around and participate in the journey of deconstructing this knowledge in order to challenge it.

The purpose of education is to recognise different ways of knowing, different ways of creating, constructing knowledge and to recognise that knowledge is created within, it is a product of interaction, organic rather than static. There is no single way of knowing and there is no right or proper knowledge, rather there are multitudes of knowledge socially constructed based on context, social background and so on.

The purpose of education is the empowering of educands and allowing learners the opportunity to analyse, question and challenge existing knowledge, the structures and hierarchies that surround us including scientific disciplines, positivism in general and the motivations and purposes of hierarchies, be these of the state, or otherwise.

Emeritus Professor Peter Moss (0176)

I welcome the Committee's decision to ask a critical question about education: what is its purpose? Such an overly political (small p) question, which necessarily generates alternative and often conflicting answers, is an essential building block for educational policy and practice, and indeed for a democratic politics of education. However, there are other critical or political questions that need to be asked and answered alongside this one, for example: What (in the words of Karl Mannheim) is 'the diagnosis of our times'? What do we want for our children (and young people), here and now and in the future? What do we mean by 'education'? What image (or understanding) do we have of the child, the teacher, the school – who or what do we think they are? What are the fundamental values of education? What ethics for education? While I will focus on one question – of purpose – my response (as any other response) is necessarily shaped by answers to these other questions. Purpose cannot be discussed in isolation.

Much discussion today about education implies that its main or only purpose is economic; to ensure national success or survival in the 'global race'; and the ability of children and young people to succeed or at least survive in an increasingly competitive and flexible economy. The discourse is premised on an assumption of constant economic growth fuelled by constantly increasing consumption: in other words, the future is assumed to be more of the same, only more so. While I accept that education always has an economic purpose, I am less clear what that should be, given my doubts about the sustainability or desirability of the current economic model (see, for example, Professor Tim Jackson's landmark report 'Prosperity without Growth' on this subject), but also given the increasing uncertainty surrounding the future of employment. In short, more of the same only more so seems an increasingly doubtful expectation, making the exact nature of the economic purpose of education neither self-evident nor inevitable.

Education, however, has always had other possible purposes – social, cultural, political and ecological – and these should, in my view, be accorded at least equal worth alongside the economic. I would suggest five purposes are of particular importance:

Peter Moss (cont)

- Education for flourishing or potentiality or emancipation: this purpose can be given various names, but is about the idea of education helping to equip the individual to live well, to achieve well-being, to realise their full capabilities, to create their own identity and to think critically (the capacity to be, do and think differently). This is related to the concept of 'education-in-its-broadest-sense', which in turn has much in common with the German concept of *bildung*, which has influenced Continental European debates about the meaning of education.
- Education for survival, sustainability and care: this purpose is about the idea of education helping to "teach the young how to take care of the world" (Jane Osberg and Gerd Biesta), at a time when we face enormous and potentially deadly threats to the future of our species, arising from a past failure to take care of the world. The late historian of education Richard Aldrich puts this purpose more starkly, arguing for 'an education for survival', with two main aims: to make preparations for survival following any catastrophes; and to foster "living well" to prevent or reduce the incidence of major catastrophes that threaten human and other species and the Earth itself". This purpose can also be understood as extending to education for care of the self and others.
- Education for democracy: at a time when democracy is in a sickly state struggling to respond to the contemporary challenges of a complex and threatened world and to retain the engagement and respect of citizens, it is important to recall and renew an important educational tradition that views democracy as a fundamental value and practice of education. In the words of John Dewey, a major figure in this tradition, "[d]emocracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife."
- Education for future-building: in contrast to a current widespread view of education as 'future proofing', moulding children for an inevitable future of more of the same, future building views the purpose of education, and the school where it takes place, as providing (in the words of Keri Facer) "a powerful democratic resource and public space that

allows its young people and communities to contest the visions of the future that they are being presented with, and to work together through the spaces of traditional and emergent democratic practice, to fight for viable futures for all".

- Education for society: education is, of course, of great benefit to the individual, but it has a wider societal benefit, making it a public good and responsibility. Its widereconomic, ecological and political (democratic) benefits have already been touched on, but it can also have other social and cultural benefits, for example promoting solidarity and cooperation, and the reproduction, renewal and emergence of societal values.

Each of these purposes, of course, depends on the answers given to other critical questions. For example, if education is understood in a broad sense; if democracy is considered as a fundamental value of education; if care is held to be an ethic of education; and if the image of the school is as a public space, a community resource and a multi-purpose institution, open to all local citizens and capable of generating many projects.

If education has a narrow, simple purpose (e.g., the production of certain predefined and uniform standards), then evaluation can be equally narrow and simple. This is evaluation as a statement of fact based on measurement (tests, exams, ratings on a scale), and it is to this type of education and evaluation that we, as a society, seem to be currently wedded. Though, of course, in practice such evaluation never turns out to be so simple as to provide an unambiguous answer (hence the constant furore about the meaning of annual exam results); while the measurement in use has required the deployment over many years of vast resources of people, time and money.

The issue of evaluation is more difficult if, as a society, we decide to choose more varied, broad and complex purposes for education – though I want to emphasise again that education, by itself, cannot fully achieve any of these purposes. In this case, we cannot fall back on some quantitative measures or metrics to tell us how good education is at achieving its purpose; there may be a place for some measurement, but measurement cannot be sufficient by itself to evaluate purposes and, in any case, the results of measurement must always

Peter Moss (cont)

be interpreted (this is, of course, always true – numbers can never tell us anything just by themselves). But complex purposes also call for another understanding of evaluation itself: as a judgment of value by those who are evaluating, rather than a statement of fact. This also begs the question of who is evaluating: is it a group of experts, to whom we as citizens delegate responsibility? or is it we as citizens who assume responsibility for evaluating the education for which we take responsibility? The distinction here is between evaluation as a technical exercise in managerial accounting; or evaluation as a political (small p) exercise in democratic accountability.

If evaluation is understood in the latter sense, as an exercise in democratic accountability, then as a society we need to change direction, channelling resources to developing new approaches to evaluating education against the purposes we have set it. It will mean working on developing and implementing a deliberative form of democratic accountability, based on the concept of a collective judgement of value. It will mean re-connecting educational institutions with their local communities and with the citizens (not just parents) who take responsibility for the education of their community's children. I don't have a simple answer to how this will work; it will need continuous work over many years - just as the present system we have has done. But it will probably involve the documentation (in various forms, including some measurement) of education and the school; and processes of dialogue and deliberation to interpret the documentation and then to seek a common judgement. The method of 'pedagogical documentation' widely known in early childhood education provides a possible model.

What I am envisaging is a complex and multi-layered process of evaluation for a complex, multi-layered process of education. Experts continue to have a role in this form of evaluation, but as one voice among many seeking to evaluate a vital local public institution, the school, in a way that does justice to its complexity, its context and its many purposes. The Danish academic Bent Flyvbjerg concludes that "no better device than public deliberation following the rules of constitutional democracy has been arrived at for settling social issues". I agree and think that we must develop methods of evaluation for education that enact that conclusion.

Sir Michael Barber (0051)

This short submission represents a summary of my thoughts on the 'purposes of education', based on my experiences in education as an adviser to the UK government but also a life-time of research, analysis and experience of delivering change around the world.

Once the purposes for education are established, the Select Committee will quickly encounter another challenge - one which is increasingly urgent, even more vital, and harder to answer. Simply put: 'what do we need to do to deliver these purposes - and not just for a select few students in a select few places, but for each and every student?' In other words, what should the next phase of system reform look like?

In this submission I will set out my thoughts on both these topics, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these further with the Committee.

As you will have experienced, debate about what students should learn often lapses into enervating controversy. At its worst, it is disconnected from our scientific understanding of how people learn. Or, at the other extreme, from the wider purposes of education as a tool to realise a 'good life' - for ourselves and for others.

To cut through this, a while back I proposed a simple formula to guide our thinking. To be well-educated can be summarised as $E(K+T+L)$.

The 'K' represents knowledge, which covers both 'Know How' (skills) as well as 'Know What'. There is significant knowledge we want children to learn in school. How to read and write and do basic mathematics; to have an understanding of the history, literature and art of the country where they live, and the fascinating links and influences that can be traced to other histories. Also, an introduction to science, and how to make (as well as use) digital technologies and digital products. In addition they will need to learn skills such as taking notes, making a compelling argument, or undertaking research.

Now some people make silly arguments that knowledge doesn't matter in a world of ubiquitous internet connectivity. Please ignore them.

The first reason is that having access to information clearly doesn't equate to knowing its significance, placing it securely into a defensible and coherent map of the domain, or using it appropriately and well.

Sir Michael Barber (cont)

The second reason is that having a rich store of knowledge actually 'frees-up' capacity to allow for creativity and problem solving. As the Australian academic John Hattie has written: "[K]nowledge literally provides the mind with room to move, to develop, and to change."

'T' stands for thinking or thought. Teaching students how to think well has been a goal of education since the time of Plato. Sometimes we will need to think alone, sometimes in teams. Sometimes fast, sometimes slowly and methodically. As well, we need to help students think about their own learning so that they can keep it on track, and to think about learning as something that necessarily involves effort, deliberate practise and overcoming failures and setbacks.

'L' is for leadership – the ability to influence those around you in the family, community, workplace or classroom. In this sense, leadership really is, or should be, for everybody. The challenge for a school or school system is to teach this quality which encompasses much of what sometimes goes under the heading of '21st century skills' – the ability to communicate, work collaboratively in teams, stand up for a point of view, see another's point of view and make decisions.

It also includes so called 'character' attributes like grit, tenacity and perseverance that we now understand are as vital to success as purely cognitive ones.

And, finally, there is an 'E' which stands for ethics and is included outside of the bracket to represent the way it should and must guide the realisation of the other three purposes. Schools should inculcate in young people the values or ethical underpinning on which our collective future depends.

My hope is that this simple formulation will allow the Committee to see past the false dichotomies that too often bedevil this debate. For example, between knowledge and skills, or creativity and the discipline of repeated practice that allows for great works of art to be performed, or scientific discoveries to be made.

It also reflects what we now know about good learning without cutting us off from the past, and what has always been true. For example, the structure and content behind the equation reassuringly reflects two

milestones in the thinking on this topic. In 1996, UNESCO published 'Learning: The Treasure Within' where 'Four Pillars of Education' are set out – Learning To Know, Learning To Do, Learning To Live Together, Learning To Live With Others and Learning To Be.

Earlier still, the 1944 Education Act – the so-called 'Butler Act' – set out the Purposes of Education as being "the spiritual, moral, mental, and physical development of the community". These remain as relevant today.

Intriguingly the Butler Act also mentions that these purposes should be realised efficiently, which brings us to the question of what we need to do to make them real. Now – urgently – we need to realise these goals to a depth, and an extent, that no system has yet managed. What we thought was good enough previously, is no longer so. It is pretty easy to see why.

Students entering formal education today will graduate to a jobs market re-shaped by robots, algorithms and big data. The jobs of the future will be much more cognitively demanding, and will demand much more leadership, than those we have at the moment.

At the same time, the long-list of pressing challenges we face - from extremism to climate change - requires even more skills of leadership, informed by the 'E' of ethics, if they are to be proportionately addressed. Schools (alongside families and the community) must have a role to play here, helping young people transition from social action in the school to social action in the community, then from the community to the national and international realm.

My second point is that doing this will mean realising what we already know about how to reform whole systems successfully and developing a capacity to innovate, not through isolated islands of innovation but at a system level, not through invention but through what Kevan Collins of the Education Endowment Foundation calls 'disciplined innovation.' That is, innovation derived from what we know about how learning takes place, and the conditions that make it more likely to occur.

So, an ambitious agenda, driven by a moral purpose where the call-to-action is robust even if the detail needs more experimentation and innovation.

An Unholy Mess: religious selection and the School Admissions Code

Ricky Thompson

In January the Government announced it is to ban all civil society organisations from objecting to state schools' admission arrangements, where they are not compliant with the School Admissions Code. This announcement was made specifically to 'stop vexatious complaints against faith schools from secularist campaign groups'. How did we get here?

In 2012 the Government actually did the opposite of what it is now proposing, widening out who could object to schools' arrangements from just a list of half a dozen groups to anyone. Nick Gibb, then Schools Minister as he is now, explained this policy to Parliament by saying that "anyone" does mean anyone, so it could be a school or a charity. The only proviso is that they must be willing to put their name to objections and to refer matters that are new or substantially new to the adjudicator'. Ironically he added that 'The regulations on which we are currently consulting will ensure that repetitive, vexatious or anonymous complaints cannot be made.'



The Code does allow religious selection by religiously designated schools, but there are lots of things it doesn't allow, like prioritising pupils in ways not allowed by the school's religious authority, requiring financial or practical support for an associated religious group, breaking the Equality Act by discriminating on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation, or failing to prioritise looked after and previously looked after children or children with statements of special educational needs.

In April 2013 the British Humanist Association dipped its toe in these new waters by submitting one objection to the London Oratory School's admission arrangements. That objection was targeted at just four things, all of which were upheld, along with a whole raft of further Code breaches identified by the adjudicator himself, totalling over 100. The case then went through a threat of judicial review, an actual judicial review, and a threat of Court of Appeal from the Oratory, but the decision essentially remained intact. When the case finally concluded in January 2016 the outcome was that something called the 'Catholic service criterion' had to be removed from the school's admissions policy. This broke the first two rules I mentioned in the last paragraph, as well as more generally being deemed to be unfair to single, time-poor parents. It prioritised parents on the basis of activities such as 'flower arranging'. In fact by the time the case was over, a series of planned objections from us had succeeded in stamping out all explicit references to 'cleaning', 'maintenance' and 'flower arranging' from schools' admissions policies, with the Oratory being the last.

Following on from the Oratory success, in 2014 we decided to submit several more objections, through the newly formed Fair Admissions Campaign. The Campaign is a single issue group just focussing on ending religious selection in state school admissions, and it is supported by the SEA, CASE, the Local Schools Network, ATL, the Runnymede Trust, and others. We submitted about 49 objections to a representative sample of religiously selective schools because we believed there were widespread breaches of the Code, but we thought it was important not just for us to say it but for the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (the tribunal that upholds the Code) to agree. Not only did the OSA confirm our views, in its decisions, but it found a load more Code breaches besides. In total amongst the cases we looked at 1,385 breaches were found, including some very serious ones – matching all the different areas of the Code I mentioned above. Schools were found to be interviewing pupils, to be unlawfully selecting on the basis of academic ability, to be asking for all sorts of un-needed information, and to

Ricky Thompson (cont)

generally have unclear, unobjective and unfair admissions criteria. One Jewish school was even found to be prioritising pupils on the basis of whether or not the parents were having sex when the mother had her period. You can read the full report at <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/anunholymess/>.

We informed DfE civil servants of our planned objections well in advance of our submitting them, and met with them throughout the objections process. They welcomed what we were doing, and our objections were also incredibly accurate – 87% of the individual objections were upheld, meaning that overall 98% of schools had at least some objections upheld. This later figure compares to about 70% of all other cases.

In the report we made a series of recommendations about areas of the Code that could be clarified, where supplementary guidance is necessary, how admissions policies might be standardised more generally, and the fact that no-one bar us has actually been monitoring compliance with the Code. The Government has not yet shown any indication of engaging with these recommendations. Instead it has listened to religious groups who in spite of the accuracy of our objections have convinced the

Government to brand them ‘vexatious’ – a term defined by HM Courts & Tribunals Service as meaning ‘individuals who persistently take legal action against others in cases without any merit’, but here used to mean something else. The Government has claimed that its changes will ‘unclog the admissions system’ by reducing the number of objections – but surely if the objections are all being upheld, such a change will lead to a system that is harder for parents to navigate, not easier, as the Government argues?

Since the announcement of the ban, we’ve been overwhelmed by support from members of the public and from parliamentarians putting down questions in the Commons and Lords – including many from the Labour benches. Shadow Education Minister Lord Watson organised an oral question on the subject and we’re hoping that the Labour front bench in the Commons will similarly pick the issue up soon.

In the meantime you can write to your MP through <http://humanism.org.uk/standupfamilies>.

**Ricky Thompson is Campaigns Manager
for the British Humanist Association**

The importance of public accountability - a response

An article by Simon Burgess in the December 2015 edition of *Education Politics* attracted much criticism and is reviewed here.

Professor Burgess reported the findings of a Bristol University paper first published in 2010. It compared GCSE results in England and Wales in the years 2000-2001 and 2004-2008. During the second period results improved faster in England than in Wales, so that by 2008 the school mean GCSE score was some 5 points higher in England.

A careful methodology was used to control for possible influences on the trend, such as the possible effect of the literacy strategy in England. By disposing of what Burgess considered the other possible explanations, he felt entitled to conclude that the wide publication of

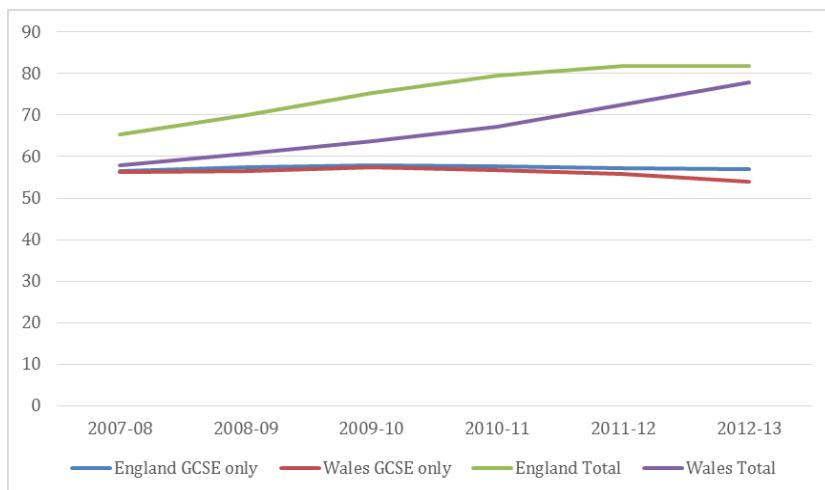
school level achievement data in England but not Wales explained the growing divergence. The timeline was crucial, since league tables were abolished in Wales in 2001, and schools’ behaviour may have changed relative to England from that date.

One factor investigated and discarded was the effect on measured performance of the take-up of GCSE-equivalent qualifications which were allowed to score in the English league tables from 2005 onwards. Take-up grew rapidly in England – at exactly the period analysed by Burgess. By 2012, the peak year, over 25% of year 11 qualifications gained in comprehensive schools in England were equivalent rather than GCSE. Burgess rejected this as a factor, noting that in 2006 they accounted for 9.5% of total GCSE points in the lowest attaining decile, and only 4.3% at the median.

The importance of public accountability - a response (cont)

However, Rees and Taylor (2014) plotted timelines to illustrate the impact on overall performance of the use of equivalent qualifications. The figure shows the relative contributions of equivalent qualifications to the performance data in each country. It makes clear that there has been little or no difference in the performance in GCSE itself between England and Wales. The gap between the two countries is almost entirely due to the take-up of equivalent qualifications, and as schools in Wales increasingly adopted them, so the gap closed.

% achieving the Level 2 Threshold, 2007-08 to 2012-13



Source: Rees G. and C. Taylor (2014) Is there a 'crisis' in Welsh education? Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymrodorion 20 pp. 97-113

Critics of Burgess have noted other differences between schools in England and Wales which he did not mention or discounted. Amongst the latter is the impact of school inspection; Burgess assumed that the Welsh and English systems were the same but during the period being studied nothing could have been further from the truth. Ofsted was regarded by schools as a terror weapon; Estyn as benign. While it would be difficult to disentangle the influence on schools in England of the various elements of the accountability regime, pupil performance data is the basis of an Ofsted judgement. This has put tremendous pressure on schools to raise results.

Another factor is the prevalence of gaming behaviour. In England, while direct cheating, such as by staff altering test papers, is increasing it is still rare in comparison with less extreme techniques which are

ubiquitous, such as stretching teaching to the test. This is not to argue that schools in Wales do not experience pressure to achieve, but it is a qualitatively different level of pressure.

The eminent statistician Harvey Goldstein makes the connected but separate point that pupils in Wales may have been handicapped by less practice at tests in comparison to those in England, with the lack of statutory key stage tests.

Another response, by Mike Newman, of SEA Cymru, makes the point that Burgess' hypothesis relies on an assumption that parents in Wales exercise choice of school as market theory would predict. In fact, the Welsh Assembly Government conducted a public consultation before the abolition of the publication of test results, and concluded that 'tables are rarely used for choice purposes outside of the large conurbations where distance means that choice is frequently not a reality'.

All of these factors are alternative explanations for the divergence of measured achievement between England and Wales during the period covered by Burgess. But Rees and Taylor show a subsequent convergence. What is the situation now?

Whilst results in England are at best stagnating, allowing for changes in league table rules in 2014, Wales continues to improve and has overtaken England in two of the three core subjects (see p18). During this period Wales has been subject to a large number of policy developments and initiatives, and it would be almost impossible to tease out the impact of any individual change, but it would be difficult for Burgess to argue that any of them were about encouraging choice behaviour by parents.

Underneath all of this discussion, however, is the crucially important factor of the socio-economic context of the two countries. There are factors which disadvantage Wales. Wales is a relatively low-wage economy with higher underemployment than in England, and relatively few higher professional jobs, so

The importance of public accountability - a response (cont)

GCSE and equivalents performance, core subjects, England and Wales

% of pupils achieving A* -C grades	subject					
	English (or Welsh first)		maths		science	
year	E	W	E	W	E	W
2013	66.5	64.1	71.6	60.3	74.2	74.8
2014	64.6	67.2	64.7	61.7	72.7	82.3
2015	64.7	69.4	65.1	64.2	69.6	83.3

child poverty is relatively high. It has been calculated by comparing Wales with a similar region of England that this could be expected to be associated with about a 2.7% lower achievement level in Wales. Another factor is the low level of immigration, nowadays seen as associated with positive impact on achievement.

So we may draw the conclusion that achievement in Wales is overtaking England and is better than

England given the socio-economic contexts. This trend has been achieved without any of the policies usually connected with market approaches to education. Thus events subsequent to the period studied by Burgess cast grave doubt on the conclusion he drew from his statistical analysis.

MJ

SEA policymaking - a way forward?

Paul Martin

Earlier this year, the SEA National Executive came to the view that it was not always easy to identify precisely our current policies. In January 2016 it commissioned me to compile 'a list of the policies on specific issues to which the SEA is currently committed, for presentation to Annual Conference' in June. The March Executive meeting received a report which provides an indexed summary of Conference motions agreed over the ten-year period 2006-2015, incorporating 120 motions.

The Executive discussed at length the report's findings. SEA policies are made up of motions passed at Annual Conferences, but they may become out of date and are not reviewed – examples were given of organisations where review happens automatically. On the other hand, motions at the conference may also be repetitive when the movers are unaware of previous debates. There is also a tendency to be reactive to issues that are causing strong feeling at the time rather than developing a considered response, so that policy becomes critical but not constructive.

An advantage of this way of policymaking is that new members in particular can participate in making Association policy by joining in with a motion's debate, but individuals working in isolation cannot easily generate a coherent policy platform.

The way forward

SEA has members with the knowledge and experience to make it 'Labour's Education Think-Tank', but if the SEA is to be a guiding spirit for a future government's programme then we need to ensure that we offer a coherent narrative with a sense of purpose. Conference should be the main but not the sole way in which the SEA makes policy. There should be additional means of debating policy areas, such as based on a document developed by a working party. One was established by the NEC to bring together a summary of our key policy positions based on a draft document entitled "What we stand for" which was presented to the meeting, and using the summary of 2006-15 decisions as support. In doing so, the NEC will provide a context for policy making.

Paul Martin (cont)



Why is this important?

In my opinion, this requires us to begin work on a proper strategy for the next ten years. To become the respected and influential force that we wish, the SEA needs to develop four key areas. We must:-

1) Make sure that the SEA is "fit for purpose" now and in 2025. We must ensure that we have the skills and resources to project our intentions ten years ahead. In particular, we should recognise that "local accountability" is a wider political aim than education. To achieve this, we will need to develop new ways of working, particularly with other campaigners in local government and build strong links to them.

2) Develop specific policy areas in terms of ideas and expertise. We should move beyond a habitual focus on "schools" and take on board key ideas such as Early Years, lifelong learning and inclusive education. We should develop the idea of a "learning society". To achieve this, we will need to identify the policy and institutional changes that need to be developed.

3) Create a popular demand for educational change. We should seek to popularise educational ideas developed by our academic associates and learn to bridge the gap between broad educational visions and the "simple demands" that popular debate requires.

a) We will need to bring together students, parents, teachers and their communities. We will need to develop institutions to express this. This might take the form of community campaigns that will act as "stakeholder governing bodies in exile".

b) We will also need to build a team of writers, speakers and other influencers who will consistently and persistently make our case at local and national levels.

c) Our aim should be to create a network that is committed to pursuing the propagation of our ideas. Part of that task will be to imagine and share the language needed to drive change.

4) Exert a persistent influence on the direction of education policy. We must be ready to offer not just criticism but solutions to policy-makers.

a) We must form a view on what share of the national wealth should be spent on education and be prepared to justify it in competition with other demands for public money. We may need to respond to a demand that this be achievable at low- or no-extra cost. A key example might be how to fund repairs and renewals of educational establishments, bearing in mind that schools and colleges buildings will have had ten or more years of low investment. We will need to be willing to say what to prioritise.

b) We will need to build a consensus on what to expect of the education workforce and how to make those roles an attractive prospect. We should anticipate the strong possibility that many staff may be poorly-trained and -qualified and have plans to tackle this.

c) We will need to have built a consensus on the initial priorities of an incoming government – at least in terms of accountability and finance – and offer an initial programme of legislation.

d) We should recognise the political importance to a new government of being seen to succeed at an early stage and identify "early wins" to support that.

e) We will need to:-

i) Offer credible blueprints for a locally-accountable education system

ii) Propose national structures to guide curriculum development backed by credible research into proven models.

iii) Put forward proposals for school improvement processes that are effective, affordable and recognise the need to regain society's trust.

Paul Martin is the membership secretary of the SEA.

SEA Annual Elections 2016

Nominations are now open for SEA Officer posts and for membership of the National Executive for 2016-17.

Self nomination is entirely acceptable and no seconders are required.

The closing date for nominations is **30th April 2016**.

Nominations can be made by post to the General Secretary at 160 Melrose Avenue, London NW2 4JY or by e-mail to socialisteducation@virginmedia.com. There is no requirement to use a nomination form.

Although the constitution does not include specific requirements, members making nominations should be mindful of the need for gender balance amongst the officers

The posts available are as follows.

Post	Current Post holder	Post	Current Post holder
Chair	Sheila Dore*	Publications Officer	Martin Johnson
Vice Chair	Mike Newman	Recruitment Officer	Chris Newman
General Secretary	John Bolt	Website Officer	David Pavett
Treasurer	Ian Duckett	Equalities Officer	New post
Membership Secretary	Paul Martin	Social Media Officer	New post
Deputy General Secretary	Martin Dore	Youth Officer	New post
Minutes Secretary	New post **		

* term completed so not eligible to be re-elected

** The NEC decided to re-designate the previous role of Organising Secretary as Minutes Secretary.

In addition nominations are invited for National Executive membership –
the NEC comprises 8 men and 8 women in addition to the officers listed above.

Forthcoming events

26th March 12.45pm, Hilton Hotel, Brighton: NUT Labour Teachers with SEA, NUT conference fringe meeting

5th April 1.00pm, Liverpool Convention Centre: SEA, ATL conference fringe meeting

14th May, Cardiff: NEC and all-member meeting: speaker, Dr Ann Crowley

25th June, London: SEA annual conference

26th June, London: NEC

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SEA General Secretary: John Bolt. email: socialisteducation@virginmedia.com

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