



# Education Politics

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In a critical assessment, the Department for Education's annual accounts have been rated as "adverse" by the National Audit Office, which said there was no clear view of academies' spending. Adverse is the most negative opinion that an auditor can give.



The Department for Education (DfE) paid Attwood Academies £6,450,000 when it took over Bexhill High Academy, one of the academies left in limbo after sponsor Prospects folded, Freedom of Information reveals.

# Editorial

We go to press before the referendum, with the result looking close. But it is not difficult to predict a period of volatility within the Tory Party. What are the chances that Nicky Morgan will keep her job when she is widely acknowledged both within and outside the DfE to be incompetent and bemused? To be fair, the government's flagship policies have not come from her; the academies ambition came from the Chancellor, while the disastrous curriculum and testing regime is all the work of her 'colleague', the Minister for Schools.

It is indeed an indictment of the political process that one know-it-all who happens to be a minister can impose a curriculum which is not supported by any experts, against the advice of his appointed experts, and then the associated primary tests which are introduced with inadequate development and piloting by a compliant testing agency. But Nick Gibb has remarkable resilience, having regained the only job in government that interests him after being 'let go' once, and maybe he will not pay the price that used to be in the British Constitution textbooks.

It is clear that Nicky Morgan herself realises she is in big trouble over testing - if the administrative errors in the 2016 SATs were not enough, the tests themselves turned out to be poorly designed, and the necessity of an 'expected standard' for accountability purposes is adding to the mess. She has opened a new charm offensive with the teacher unions, currently underwhelmed with the effects in schools of the workload reduction agenda she sponsored. She may have her eyes on the primary Assessment Review Group recently established by the National Association of Head Teachers, widely expected to provide a justification for a boycott of tests in 2017. But what can she do? Another U-turn might be ruled bad politics, and if not she has a track record of being outflanked on testing by her junior, who enlisted Downing Street against her.

Besides, Ms Morgan may be more exercised by another fine mess - the one created by George Osborne. While the newspapers and too many Labour MPs were taken in by the largely cosmetic U-turn on academies, she cannot take for granted the rebellious back benchers behind her. With the Tory led Local Government Association continuing its opposition to enforced conversion (see p7), will it become emboldened to stretch it to schools caught by the new law on coasting and struggling? And it is clear that the DfE continues to struggle itself, because it just cannot find enough sponsors willing take on these schools, making the prospects for total academisation somewhat uncertain.

One reason for the reticence amongst the go-ahead business people this government hoped to attract is simple: even these ministers know that they could not get away with allowing sponsors to turn a profit. Indeed, go-ahead people are making money out of MATs, but mostly not lawfully. The main avenues for this are the inflated pay arrangements of some CEOs, often by means of additional contracts, or related party transactions which have been contracted outside the rules. The astonishing thing is that related party transactions are permitted at all. As we know, a major objection to the academies programme is the lack of capacity of the state to monitor their spending in sufficient detail to prevent abuses of these kinds.

We have seen the 2016 White Paper; we await the Education for All Bill. This edition of Education Politics has a focus on a number of aspects of the White Paper. It is not a balanced review because there is virtually nothing to be positive about.

How has the government got in such a mess with its education policies? One clue came recently from Michael Gove, when he said, 'I think people in this country have had enough of experts'. Misperceiving a very large mound of academic evidence on a variety of education topics as a blob, and a marxist one at that, Gove, like Gibb, was convinced he knew better than the experts. Instead of people with experience and knowledge, this government has gone further than most in promoting its friends.

Now we are to have as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills someone with no expertise in education. Some were quick to criticise her lack of experience as a teacher or school leader, but perhaps a lack of experience in inspection is a more critical deficit. Her experience is in accountancy, her commitment is to the private sector, her predilection is for academy chains.

If we are looking for a track record, as Chair of Ofqual Amanda Spielman has presided over the qualifications chaos now playing out to the detriment of all learners, a chaos she does not even recognise. Things could get no worse.

Really? If the referendum result leads to a de facto change of government, one name being touted in some quarters as Nicky Morgan's replacement is Graham Brady. Now here we have someone completely blind to the evidence on grammar schools. In the autumn there is to be a celebration of 50 years of comprehensive education. Could it yet turn into a wake?

# Educational Excellence Everywhere?

In 1997 the big white paper was called 'Excellence in Schools'. In 2016 we have 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'. Does this mean that over the past two decades governments have enabled schools to perform at a high level, and now the task is just to ensure that all schools are raised to the same level? No, it means that those inventive youngsters with an ear for the catchy phrase but no eye for evidence have continued to increase their influence in government. For education policymakers, Educational Excellence Everywhere is breathtaking. It is probably unprecedented for the number of assertions which are unevidenced and for which the evidence is contrary. It is certainly unprecedented in completely failing to deal with the major challenges facing schools in England at the time of its publication.

The following pages contain a variety of perspectives on the White Paper. Perhaps the most important contributions are two from parents (pp 4-6). Although by chance they hail from the same part of the world, they speak for millions of parents across the country. How far has the government travelled! In 2010, parents were to be at the heart of free schools. In 2016, they have become an obstruction.

The classroom experience for pupils is becoming more and more impoverished and stressful, with dire impacts on child and adolescent mental health. Of course, there are a number of social factors behind children's mental health difficulties but the pressure on schools to meet performance targets is clearly a major contributor. It is now commonplace for commentators to describe the language of politicians as Orwellian, but the Minister of Schools must be in line for a prize for blaming schools for putting SATs candidates under pressure. With a crazy curriculum, narrowed even further by intensification of teaching to the test, and continuing pressure on staff time, the pupil experience in England's schools is likely to deteriorate further. But ministers are deaf to this.

Instead, the proposals for privatisation of the school system are the government's obsession. Its two central contentions, that local authorities control schools which would become autonomous in multi-academy trusts (more appropriately called chains, as John Bolt points out on p8) are quite obviously the opposite of the truth. It claims, correctly, that administering two largely separate systems is inefficient, but it is truly bizarre to conclude that the 78% of schools should fall in line with the 22% whose 'system' remains largely an aspiration. In their briefing for the event reported on p7, Reclaiming Education, the umbrella group for

campaigning organisations including SEA, points out that the proposals amount to privatisation, since academy trusts are private companies subject to company law, but not marketisation, because there will be no trade between trusts. These companies are favoured or otherwise by administrative decisions of the state. Such a system can be described as corporatism, the economic model adopted by the fascist regimes of the last century.

Kevin Courtney describes on p16 the danger to national pay arrangements and the prospect of individualised pay which has proved so disastrous in Sweden. Geoff Barton (p14) and Paula Stone (p12) review some of the less publicised but even more damaging proposals around initial and continuing education and development of teachers, and their qualifications. It has been said that the White Paper does not address the current outstanding system challenges of teacher shortage, supply of school places, and teacher workload, but it clearly does deal with teacher numbers – in its way. Already we see academies advertising for teaching assistants at £11,000 pa. The proposed model is for chains to train and accredit such staff as teachers, thus solving the teacher shortage and school budget crises at a stroke. What possible flaw could there be in that?

We await more detail on the proposals for teacher education and accreditation by academies. If they were implemented, it would be years before the downward trend in pupil performance became obvious, and the damage to the teaching profession would take a generation to repair. At the same time, the determination to intensify accountability by means of performance data and inspection outcomes can only maintain the workload pressures and stress which are making the profession so unattractive.

Graham Clayton points out (p10) that the government's U-turn on enforced conversion of all schools gives many schools a choice, and nobody should assume that an intention inevitably becomes a fact. Nevertheless, as the Education and Adoption Act 2016 is implemented, many other schools will be caught in one or other category of schools liable to enforced conversion. There is much to play for to prevent educational excellence nowhere. Whoever is the next Secretary of State, retreat on some aspects of the proposals seems likely, but some damaging moves on both school privatisation and teacher de-professionalisation seem inevitable.

# Parents, a Driving Force

## Fiona Forrest

I am a single parent from South East London, with an 11 year old daughter. My last job was a team leader for Sainsbury's. I was one of those parents who trusted our school to deliver a great academic and learning environment for my child.

In 2007 St. Matthew Academy (SMA) Catholic School was formed after the amalgamation of St. Josephs boys school and Our Lady of Lourdes primary school. My daughter joined SMA from nursery and is now in year 6. In 2015 SMA had poor exam results, this triggered the engagement of two executive heads and in January 2016 our Governors were dismissed. During these times, changes to our secondary school life were imposed:

- year 7-11 lining up in the mornings
- no morning break
- tutor time shortened
- no pastoral team
- no Inclusion Unit
- exclusion fast track advertised at main reception (taken down now)
- published student rankings on the walls
- Saturday detentions
- the implementation of 'positives and negatives' for behaviour.

A letter was sent to parents about each new change and when they would take effect. Not once were teachers, students or parents consulted about these changes. SMA abused our trust.

One of the changes that has had a detrimental effect was the public rank order. If you were at the bottom of the order you were bullied. There was nothing in place to support that child. One child who was affected wrote in her history book about wanting to kill herself. The principal told the parent that it was 'sorted'. Things for the child were good for a while but when the assessments came round again the child started to 'slip' again. The parent has now taken the child out of SMA.

Myself and other parents wanted to find out more about the changes as the effect on our school was palpable. No 'happy smiley' teachers, unhappy students, an air of fear as no eye contact was made any more. We had meetings with our principal but he couldn't answer our questions. We contacted the Catholic Director of Education for Southwark, we were 'fobbed off'! Our parent governor (PG) was unaware of these changes and could not answer our queries. Our PG contacted various senior leaders, but to no avail, they fobbed him

off too. Teachers were told not to talk to us and we were told to only talk to our principal or the Head of Primary directly. To his credit, our principal has kept his parent forums open. There were a few 'heated' moments but a sense of normality was kept.

Why were these changes happening? Why are our teachers not happy? Has anyone spoken to our students about the changes?



After months of trying to get answers, I made contact with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) by emailing Dominic Herrington with my concerns after hearing about his pending visit to SMA. I received a call from his office and spoke at length and requested that Dominic talk to the students and teachers separately to make sure they were okay. This did happen but we parents had no feedback. We found out that Dominic Herrington told the senior leaders about my e-mail and named me as the concerned parent and I was subjected to a disapproving rant from our principal.

We also contacted our MP Heidi Alexander who listened and was very supportive. Heidi supported our meeting with Lewisham Borough Youth and Education Team but unfortunately SMA is an independent school and the LA was not affected by our concerns, only our attendance and safeguarding policies.

Our school is effectively in 'special measures' and our parents are not aware. The parent voice is quiet because we trust our heads and our education system. But it is changing, as our schools turn into businesses. The same education system we loved, trusted, and cherished is turning into an exam factory. We are going to need families, parents and communities even more to fill the gaps schools are no longer caring about.

Just think, we bring a child into this world; as parents, we love, nurture and provide, teach them values and keep them safe. They are ours until they are 18. We send them to school, trust they will grow, learn and develop in partnership with us. The reality is that decisions are made without us. Monies are given for each child to be educated and invested but parents are

not allowed in! We have a duty to send our child to school and parents can go to prison if they don't. Where is the partnership? Parents are a driving force, without them there would be no children, the decent thing to do is to include us, we are one unit.

**Fiona Forrest is a parent**

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## Parents, an Obstruction?

**Nicky Dixon**

Autumn 2014. I visited my local secondary schools' open days with my Y6 son, talking to teachers and pupils and watching how they interacted with my son. We inspected facilities, watched classes in progress. My son and I decided our preferences, so I asked my husband to visit our first choice school. We chose the biggest secondary school in the borough over other local comprehensive schools and academies. We liked the feel of the place, the facilities, including the focus on performing arts. My son especially liked the library and the partnership with a premier league football club.

By Christmas 2014, rumours were flying around that the council was intervening in the school. I had no idea what that meant and met other parents to better understand. It seemed that the council did not think the school leadership had the capacity to secure rapid improvement; its previous Ofsted inspection rated the school "Requires Improvement". The council issued an intervention order requiring the school to partner with an academy chosen by the council. The governors and head teacher opposed the move, preferring to remain with the existing academy partner. Ofsted upheld the council decision; the governors were removed in January 2015 and an IEB (Interim Executive Board) established. The scale of the parent protest resulted in the council's preferred academy choice walking away.

I asked my MP to facilitate a meeting with the council as I still did not understand why the council held the view it did. Our MP arranged the meeting; however, the head of the school advised current parents not to attend this meeting or any meetings with the council. So, Y6 parents attended the meeting, not having the foggiest idea about RAISEonline, floor standards etc.

Still, we opened the communication channels and that became the start of my education campaign.

Unfortunately, the IEB identified a large budget deficit and had to deal with that, which included trying to save money to repay the deficit. A new deputy head was hired at the beginning of 2015, and subsequently appointed head when the then head of the school resigned in April 2015. A CEO was appointed full time from July 2015. The school improved its GCSE results significantly by 11% to 55% in 2015. Improvements were made by the leadership team, such as the implementation of a homework portal, so that pupils and parents knew what homework had been issued.

My son started school last September. He enjoys the learning, he enjoys the facilities, he takes part in a few after school clubs (free); he joined the lunchtime debating society and was also appointed a junior librarian, tidying up after school on Fridays. His academic achievements have been rewarded with trips to the theatre and ice skating. He has been invited to join the orchestra as he has made good progress in playing the saxophone, and he has also been invited to join the French after school club, which he has done.

This is our local community school – it takes children of all abilities, all backgrounds, no selection and offers a rounded curriculum, with strong performing arts. It has award winning choirs, the orchestra tours the world. It has a recording studio and artist in residence. Y7 children receive free viola lessons through the partnership with the Music in Secondary Schools Trust. It has a deaf education centre and children can learn to sign to communicate with the hard of hearing.

## Nicky Dixon (cont)

Ofsted arrived in February 2016 and performed what the IEB has described as a negative and hostile inspection, resulting in a Category 4 rating. A 19 page letter of complaint has been submitted, noting for instance, that an inspector made a member of staff cry. No recognition was given for the improvements that have been made; there was no acknowledgement that the CEO had only been in post full-time since last July.

The Regional School Commissioner has issued an Academy Order, so now we wait to hear who the sponsor will be. He doesn't know our school, he's never visited. He doesn't know our teachers or our children, he's never met them. He is advised by a Head Teacher Board made up of academy leaders. They don't know our school either.

I'm not sure that any of them care about the upheaval they are going to cause to the school and to the children. The Regional School Commissioner is performing a bureaucratic exercise to meet his performance targets. I e-mailed him in April as I read his 2016 vision statement which said he wanted to be more transparent. He didn't reply. Our school is going to be forced to face more upheaval and receive a structural change, when it was already improving following the council's intervention.

Parents lost consultation rights when the Education & Adoption Bill received Royal Assent. Nick Gibb MP wrote to a friend of mine and advised her that "protesting parents are an obstruction to be removed". The local authority says it has no influence, but we know it is talking to the Regional School Commissioner.

I have only just learned that the Academy Order was issued in May – my MP received the information from the Regional School Commissioner. The council and school haven't told parents. But a sponsor still has not been found and it is rumoured that a MAT is put off by the budget deficit. We are in limbo; the school cannot recruit teachers and plan for next year. It's like waiting for the grim reaper to swing his arm. What happens if a sponsor cannot be found soon?

What are we going to lose? What is our school going to become? Will the school keep its after school clubs and the great partnerships it has? I hope it doesn't become an exam factory – schools should be fun for our children, a place to learn and develop, not to stress over academic performance.

Why can't the school be left alone – it has already suffered upheaval with the council intervention, why kick when the school is already down. A few parents have written to Sir Michael Wilshaw to support our school, and to indicate the improvements that have been made that have not been acknowledged by Ofsted, and to advise of the strengths we believe the school has. We know Ofsted does not want to hear from parents, but we felt the need to go on record to support our school.



I do not understand how the government can argue that parents are vital to a school, when we are now isolated and have no opportunity to shape our school or offer our views. It feels as though we are being unfairly punished – but we have done nothing wrong, other than support our local community school.

I spoke at my council's recent Children and Young People Select Committee to urge the council to give parents a formal voice in the education of our children. It will be considered at the full council meeting in July. I have a horrid sense of the sands of time running away.

**Nicky Dixon is a parent**

# White Paper briefing in the House of Commons

In May, Reclaiming Education, the umbrella campaigning organisation, held a successful briefing in the House of Commons on the White Paper. Chaired by Catherine West MP, it was also attended by MPs Ian Mearns and Bill Esterson and cross-bench peer Lord Listowel.

A major theme was the importance of a continued cross-party coalition against proposals for forced academisation, raised by the opening speaker, the Conservative Cllr Roy Perry, Leader of Hampshire County Council and Chair of the LGA's Children and Young People Board. He pointed out the lack of capacity of MATs to provide the level of service offered by local authorities, such as the lack of capacity within the DfE to utilise local knowledge when negotiating with developers to provide sites for new schools, and the expense in legal fees alone of conversion to academy status. While the LGA did not take a position on academies as such, it would continue to oppose forced conversion. It was unclear whether this covered the current practice applied to failing and coasting schools or just the two further categories likely to be proposed in the Education for All Bill.

Richard Watts, the Labour Leader of Islington Council, echoed the need for cross-party working. He pointed to the lack of sufficient or quality sponsors for an academised system. Watts also attacked the Regional Schools Commissioner covering Islington for having 'no idea' what was happening in schools, in contrast to the LA. He also described a local free school whose sponsor was named in the Panama Papers; it also owns an educational supplies company which provides to the school without tender.

Outgoing NUT leader Christine Blower pointed out that the government's 'U-turn' was actually a swerve. She also criticised other aspects of the proposals, such as the abolition of QTS and doubts about the STRB, and pointed out that the White Paper ignored the real problems facing schools. The final panel speech came from a Lewisham parent, Fiona Forrest, who told the shocking story repeated on p4; a number of the sixteen speakers from the floor were clearly shocked by it.

Amongst the contributions from the floor, Ian Mearns made his usual well-informed remarks, and

condemned as 'lazy journalism' the constant repetition by the media of the totally misleading phrase 'local authority controlled schools.'

Bill Esterson reminded the meeting that the House of Commons Select Committee had produced an excellent report on academies which confirmed the lack of evidence on academy performance. He also referred to another effect of current policies, the narrowing curriculum which undermines true education.

The event exposed some difference of emphasis in interpreting the announcement by the Secretary of State of a climb-down on legislation to enforce total academisation. Many members of the PLP and other commentators, wishing to maximise the government's discomfort, insist that it amounts to a 'U-turn'. Both Mearns and Esterson joined Christine Blower and other campaigners who prefer to call it a swerve because the government remains determined to fight the war by other means.

Two other speakers made important contributions on MATs. The first was that the government envisaged the system being run by about 2,000 chains; even if that many sponsors could be found, would they have the capacity to manage the system? The second raised the scenario of a MAT abandoning one of its schools when it got into trouble, for example by starving it of funding.

Another speaker pointed out that the charity Alliance for Inclusive Education was receiving an increasing number of calls about discrimination in academies against young people with disabilities. Others reinforced the point that parents had no avenue for complaints against academies, and one parent worried that nothing has been said about responsibility for school transport, a big issue in rural counties. SEA Vice-President Melissa Benn ended the debate by reminding us that in 2010, free schools were introduced as a parent-led initiative, but now parents were sidelined.

In summing up, the panel re-emphasised the importance of supporting parents' groups and a cross-party coalition continuing to oppose enforced conversion. Attendees departed wondering whether those key players, Tory backbenchers, would do just that if and when the Education for All Bill comes to the House.

# Putting our schools in chains

## John Bolt

The current education White Paper contains a ragbag of proposals, some new and some very familiar. But at its heart is the delivery of a fully academised school system. Its publication stirred up massive opposition in all parties and in its initial form was rapidly abandoned. But the DfE is clear that the objective has not changed – only the approach. We are back to picking off schools more gradually with new criteria for forced academisation being introduced. The aim is still to arrive at a tipping point where the local authority role becomes untenable and unaffordable.

At the heart of this policy is the view that there is nothing that the private sector can't do better than the public sector. And that organisations are held best accountable by market forces rather than democratic processes. But in this case there is more to it than that. The government is determined not just to change structures but to impose a particular ideology about how teachers should teach and how pupils should learn.

In November 2015, Nick Gibb gave a speech<sup>1</sup> in which he spelt out his beliefs about the school system. Alongside the usual cherry-picking of data that ministers use to try and justify their policies, he made a significant attempt to explain his commitment to the academy model.

According to Gibb, English schools are defined by "*coasting and underperformance*". He compares schools to the car industry of the 1970s and wants to see them move from "*a system of conformity and central control, to one of enterprise and innovation*." His argument is that "*the fundamental premise for school autonomy has always been that the current mode of education, the orthodoxy that governs how schools are run and how lessons are taught, has not been good enough. For decades, too many English schools have been under-performing or coasting. The only way to challenge such schools is innovation through autonomy.*" By which of course he means academies.

It is important from the start to understand the absolutely fundamental flaws in this argument.

1 Gibb's model of central control is a fantasy and has been for many years. He uses the example of how King Solomon's Academy serves lunch as evidence of how autonomy transforms standards. Does he really imagine that headteachers have ever had to ask permission to change how they manage school meals? The idea that "*a system of conformity and central control*" was imposed on schools is patently ridiculous. Schools have varied hugely in their culture and

organisation and there has been a continuing record of innovation and experimentation.

2 What Gibb actually means of course is that not many schools bought into his vision of teaching and learning. In this same speech he makes it very clear that for him autonomy is about being free to do things his way. This is the man who has imposed a draconian testing regime on primary schools (at 5, 6, 7 and 11 years) and prescribes the English and maths curricula in exhaustive detail down to the words pupils should be able to spell at each age and the right way to do long division.



3 And of course in Gibb's world, it's not the school that has control of its destiny. It's the multi-academy trust – though chain always seems like a more appropriate name. They should, he tells us, "*be bound by a philosophical and pedagogical vision.*" What price then the autonomy of a headteacher who wants to challenge a chain's "*culture of conformity and control*"? And chains will, of course, be run by "*experienced business people*" who know so much better than the poor deluded public sector how to run things. Like the banks, the steel industry, British Home Stores and all the other triumphs of British business.

If we are to challenge what this government is doing, it is first essential to recognise that the academy model is simply not working. There is no evidence that, overall, academies do better than maintained schools. Argument by individual anecdote about a successful academy proves nothing. Proper analysis of both test scores and inspection findings do not support the belief in academy superiority<sup>2</sup>. This realisation is now beginning to penetrate unexpected corners of the media. The Times recently reported that: "*The disparity in standards between England's academy chains is revealed for the first time today, raising fresh questions about government claims that*

## John Bolt (cont)

*academy status elevates the performance of schools. ....Only three of the 16 biggest secondary academy chains had a positive impact on pupils' progress, according to the analysis produced for The Times by PwC."*

Not only do academies not deliver at this basic level but the spread of this model is undermining the fundamentals of a public education service. Some of this is also the result of the spread of competition and marketisation throughout the system but academies are more able to exploit their basic lack of public accountability. So we have seen a range of financial scandals, manipulation of admissions, attempts to get rid of low achieving pupils or those with SEN and refusal to co-operate with local agreements and policies.

It's important, as ever, to be clear that not every academy chain is financially dubious and many work well with their neighbours and maintain the principles of public service. But too many don't and the current system is stacked in their favour. The wishes of the individual school are often upheld against the views of the wider community of schools and parents – as recently in Bury<sup>3</sup> and Redditch<sup>4</sup>.

The academy system is absurdly cumbersome, bureaucratic and expensive. Every school has an individual legal contract with the DfE – contracts that impose different duties depending on when it was signed. And every academy has to comply with both charity law and company law. It has to manage its own HR, health and safety, accountancy, audit, purchasing and compliance with a myriad of regulations and instructions from government.

We need to understand that all of this makes a difference to real pupils and real families. A system which is unplanned and subject to the whims of individual heads and academy chains will not deliver opportunities for all. Nor will a system which bases itself on competition rather than collaboration.

Structures do actually affect whether we deliver high standards combined with fairness and equality for all. They also determine whether we are using finite resources to best advantage. At the moment we are doing none of these things and the problems are growing rather than diminishing. It is time for some more fundamental thinking by Labour on these issues. Just opposing compulsory conversion is not adequate. There is a need for a new and comprehensive approach:

- There needs to be a new and straightforward legal framework which establishes all schools as self-

governing, bound by appropriate regulations approved in Parliament and answerable for their performance to local democratic authorities. Private contracts, company law etc. need have no place in the governance of schools.

- Local authorities should have the power to plan school places properly and should manage admissions to all schools including ensuring appropriate provision for children with special needs.
- Schools should be able, as a free choice, to work with other schools and other organisations – some may choose to retain their links with their current sponsors but should be free to end any such arrangement. Schools should be independent and not controlled as they are now by academy chains.
- Where schools are underperforming, the focus should be on support and improvement not on expensive and time-consuming structural change. It should be recognised that local authorities could require some reduction in a failing school's autonomy.

Achieving this would actually not be as hard as is sometimes suggested. This government has several times used legislation to override academy contracts. The money being spent on Regional Commissioners and on the EFA could be redistributed to local authorities. Outside the true believers like Gibb, it would actually not be hard to build a broad consensus behind reforms like these. Few people actually want to defend the current confusion but they're curiously unwilling to think about truly coherent alternatives – it's time to say out loud that this particular Emperor has no clothes and he urgently needs a new suit!

### Footnotes

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/how-autonomy-raises-standards>

2 There is a detailed analysis of these claims at <http://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/2016/03/the-white-paper-justification-for-academy-conversion-is-pathetic> and at <http://www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk/2016/03/nicky-morgan-is-that-really-all-the-evidence-youve-got>

3 <http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/sybil-andrews-academy-in-bury-st-edmunds-potentially-unviable-if-two-new-free-schools-open-claim-14544374>

4 <http://schoolsweek.co.uk/rsc-agrees-to-expansion-of-redditch-schools-despite-mp-and-parent-concerns/>

**John Bolt is General Secretary of the SEA**

# Now U don't have to turn – into an academy

## Graham Clayton

Well, was it a U-turn or was it not ? What does Nicky Morgan's up to date position on what has been called "forced academisation" really amount to?

Since Margaret Thatcher's declaration that she was not for turning, the press has tended to label every shift under pressure in government policies a U-turn. Strictly defined, that means of course a reversal in policy which involves a change of course in completely the opposite direction. Nicky Morgan's latest policy on academisation cannot possibly be said to be that, but if a climb-down in journalist speak is a U-turn, then she has certainly made a U-turn and one of great significance.

The forced academisation policy was not of course announced by Nicky Morgan but by Chancellor George Osborne in his March 2016 budget statement. He said: "*We are going to complete the task of setting schools free from local education bureaucracy, and we're going to do it in this Parliament*" and he committed the funds to make it happen.

The statement unleashed a storm of protest, not least from Tory MPs and politicians in local government. On 6th May, Nicky Morgan's press release conceded in all too typical face saving style, "*Since launching our proposals in the education white paper, the government has listened to feedback from MPs, teachers, school leaders and parents. As a result of these conversations, the government has decided, while reaffirming our continued determination to see all schools to become academies in the next 6 years, that it is not necessary to bring legislation to bring about blanket conversion of all schools to achieve this goal.*"

The press did not fall victim to the illusion. The headlines screamed of yet another Government U-turn. Three days later Nicky Morgan faced Lucy Powell across the House of Commons and repeated her statement. Lucy Powell called it a U-turn. Nicky Morgan did not deny it.

So, although without a doubt government policy remains that every school should become an academy within the next 6 years, there is not going to be legislation to require it.

That's a U-turn.

Had there been legislation, it probably would not have been recognisable as anything forcing maintained schools to go through an academisation process. Rather more likely, it would have been a more straightforward abolition of local authority maintained school status and its replacement by a new legal framework governing publicly funded privately managed schools - a rather more accurate description than the title "academy" which pompously assumes the superiority of the academic over skills.



So without that legislation, local authority maintained school status will, it seems, still exist in our law of education. Government policy will be that such schools should disappear – but government policy is not law. We may perhaps have become rather used to the idea that what the government says it wants for the education service, that is what must be done.

But it isn't so. I remember a Secretary of State who once claimed the right to have his way by asserting the right of the Queen's ministers to exercise the authority of the Crown. The royal prerogative it is called. The court would have none of it. Unless a ministerial demand is clearly just a bit of administration of already existing law, it must have the clear authority of legislation approved by Parliament. Nicky Morgan has abandoned the proposal to legislate to implement her policy. What makes her May 6th statement a major climb-down is that school

## Graham Clayton (cont)

authorities, provided their schools are performing well, will retain a choice. They can decline to convert to academy status.

The qualification of that statement about choice is necessary because the government has already taken the legal power in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 already on the statute book to force "failing" and "coasting" schools to become academies. We still

We may perhaps have become rather used to the idea that what the government says it wants for the education service, that is what must be done.

**But it isn't so.**

await the final version of the legal definition of a coasting school, but journalist Warwick Mansell has estimated, on the basis of the government's proposals in draft, that one in five schools might fall within the definition. Without a rapid upward shift in their performance statistics the fate of these schools could already be sealed.

However, that still leaves a lot of schools with choice - and the absence of legislation forcing academisation for all will still leave the curious policy anomaly that forced academisation is perceived as the threatened consequence of government defined inadequate performance. Even this of course is despite the lack of any valid long term evidence or logical argument that academisation achieves the objectives claimed for it.

Choice matters. School leaders and managers, working with their supportive local authorities of all political complexions, can take heart. They can hold out. And six years is a long time. There is another general election intervening before the end of that policy timetable. If Labour and its allies can develop a coherent education policy based on democratic accountability for the strategic delivery of our education service and then achieve an electoral victory in 2020, a full U-turn can be achieved and the absurd obsession with academisation can be consigned to history.

**Graham Clayton is an education law specialist and member of the New Visions for Education Group**

### A comprehensive education?

Did you benefit from attending a comprehensive secondary school?

Or do you know someone who did? Perhaps someone who would have had no chance in a secondary modern system? Someone who used that chance to become successful in some way?

The next edition of Education Politics will focus on the success of comprehensive schools. Can you help? If you know a comprehensive success story, email [epeditor@gmail.com](mailto:epeditor@gmail.com) for further details.

Thanks. Martin Johnson, Editor

# Should teachers be trained or educated?

## Paula Stone

The education White Paper was published on 17th March. A quick scan of the newspaper headlines following its publication revealed pretty much what was expected – a focus on the academisation of schools. However buried within chapter two of this lengthy document is the Government's vision 'Great Teachers – everywhere they're needed'. The profession takes for granted that all children and young people need and deserve excellent teachers so as a Senior Lecturer of Initial Teacher Education I turned to page 24 with anticipation.

Not unsurprisingly, the government's main aim is to strengthen teacher training. This in itself is a much contested phrase as those of us in universities prefer to use the term teacher education in a bid to assert the value of education rather than training. It is proposed, by creating an 'expert' group led by Stephen Munday (CBE), to develop a new core content framework for ITT courses based on recommendations made by the Carter review of ITT (2015). It is anticipated that this core content will include:

- subject knowledge development
- subject-specific pedagogy
- child and adolescent development
- planning
- assessment
- differentiation
- professionalism
- evidence-based teaching

This technical-rationalist approach to ITT supports a model in which the dominant ideological values are taken for granted; learning and teaching are treated as a science with a set of general principles; the teacher determines what is learned and how according to the scientific principles determined by the policy makers; and the learner responds to learning stimuli in a predictable way. This content, whilst accompanied by a wider discourse of research-informed teaching, casts teachers as rule-following technicians who are expected to directly apply 'proven' techniques derived from research to enhance their practice. This has been borne out by a recent flurry of 'tools' and techniques to enable teachers to teach like a champion.

In this model the work of teachers is portrayed as a craft. Indeed the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, adopted this message when he argued:

*"Teaching is a craft and is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route in acquiring mastery in the classroom".*

Thus central to the improvement to teacher training set out in the White Paper, the government has committed to a major expansion of a school-led ITT system, with schools taking greater responsibility for all aspects of teacher training.



I would argue that teaching is too complex and too situated in particular settings, too dependent on the professional identity of the teacher, to be reduced to a set of skills to be learnt and performed in the classroom. The profession needs teachers who are imaginative and independent thinkers, who are knowledgeable about theory, and who are able to integrate this knowledge into their own practice. Whilst of course situated professional knowledge is essential in learning to become a teacher, what passes for judgements and decisions purely based on observing others' practice is an unreliable basis on which to make good decisions in the classroom. The profession needs

## Paula Stone (cont)

both school and university participation in the training of student teachers based on an understanding of the distinct contributions each can make to the education of teachers.

There is no denying that substantial experience of teaching in realistic conditions in schools and settings is an absolute prerequisite for the creation of good teachers; in addition, student teachers need to draw on well thought through and coherent conceptual frameworks of education, on knowledge of well-substantiated empirical research, and on considered ethical principles, and this is the role of the university.

Universities are needed to give student teachers access to disciplinary knowledge and to participate in the scholarly communities where that knowledge is being produced and debated. Universities offer a space in which teachers are able to question taken-for-granted ways of doing things and develop their own independent views on alternatives based on the theoretical perspectives and systematic ways of thinking that a strong grounding in the disciplines provides. Such questions will not all have an immediate obvious relevance to teachers' work in schools but they are important. In the school setting it is often difficult, both politically and interpersonally, to question taken-for-granted norms. Universities provide a supportive and facilitative space where thinking differently and creatively is positively encouraged.

The White Paper also proposes the introduction of new quality criteria for ITT providers, which will focus on the quality of training programmes, the effectiveness of provider in recruiting high quality trainees and the impact on the standards of teaching by those trainees in schools. What concerns me is that these new quality criteria will be based on the current ideological viewpoint that training for teachers is best conducted in schools, which presumes a further erosion of the role of universities.

The White Paper also proposes the introduction of a 'more challenging' accreditation than that of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This new accreditation, based on the ability to teach well, advanced subject knowledge and understanding of up to date evidence,

will be awarded by headteachers of 'great schools'. It will remove the universities' traditional and important role of quality assurance. I am concerned that this will make the teaching profession less robust and more parochial, as schools will be awarding the accreditation on whether the teacher 'performs' to their set of criteria.

So what role does the university have to play in the future of teacher education? Since allocation of trainees will be based on the Government's criteria of what constitutes a high quality provider (which is yet unknown), universities' ability to plan strategically will be severely undermined. I think that it is reasonable to predict based on the trajectory of the Government's agenda for school-led ITT that the proportion of funding going to universities will reduce as schools increasingly negotiate the best available 'deals' to be found across the diversifying market for teacher training provision. As such, the intellectual contributions of HE-based teacher educators to all aspects of our ideal vision of teacher education will now be further diminished.

To conclude, I would like to return to the recommendation of the White Paper, "*to strengthen university and school-led training, increasing the rigour of ITT content with a greater focus on subject knowledge and evidence based practice*". This suggests an interplay between public knowledge (theory and research) and practical wisdom. The complexity of teachers' knowledge should not allow for a distinction between these two ways of working, and ministers need to recognise that both make a powerful contribution to the creation and development of effective practice in schools. As such, instead of creating a sense of suspicion around what universities are offering students, the White Paper should be aiming for a stronger partnership between schools and universities in which the distinctive contributions of each setting are recognised and indeed exploited.

**Paula Stone is Senior Lecturer in Primary Education at Canterbury Christ Church University**

# Teaching — learning profession or joyless job?

Geoff Barton

At the height of the EU referendum campaign, former Education Secretary and Brexit cheerleader Michael Gove said something striking. Asked on Sky News why so few economists supported the idea of quitting Europe, Mr Gove said, “people in this country have had enough of experts”. So now we know. It’s a pretty remarkable comment from someone who spent almost five years overseeing England’s education system. But somehow as a comment it captures the educational zeitgeist and exemplifies this Government’s view of the teaching profession. Rarely has teaching felt itself so denuded of professionalism, so marginalised, so unsupportive of the notion of expertise.

There is a range of policies that has reinforced this perception. In so many of those principalities we are supposed to aspire to be (such as Finland, Ontario, Shanghai) teaching is high status. Here it feels to have been marginalised. The ‘free’ school programme from its giddy launch in 2010 reinforced this perception. One of the apparently intoxicating freedoms for these new schools would be to appoint teachers without qualifications. This, we were led to believe, would allow school leaders to appoint the best person for the job, the implication of course being that those who had spent a year gaining qualified teacher status may not be the best people.

A qualification – the official badge for a set of acquired skills and knowledge – was seen as unimportant. Thus was born a sense that the professional validation of teaching was suddenly worth less, and possibly worthless. It’s a view reinforced lately in the White Paper, which again resorts to a pick-n-mix approach to professional standards, by leaving headteachers to decide whether a trainee teacher is up to scratch or not, potentially after just a few weeks in the job.

We saw something like this previously. The same decision was made to render the National Professional Qualification for Headship merely optional. If we believe the quality of school leadership is as important as the Education Secretary and Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector constantly tells us, then why wouldn’t we want a mandatory qualification to ensure that every would-be head has covered the same ground? Why wouldn’t we want them – before they start their headship – to be assessed against nationally agreed criteria? Just as I feel reassured that everyone who works in a kitchen has a food hygiene certificate, I suspect parents may appreciate teachers who have

been assessed formally against professional standards and headteachers who have done the same.

Those enthralled by market forces and beguiled by words like ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ will perceive the new approach as liberating. They will view those of us who subscribe to certain prescribed norms as enemies of promise. And that’s where so much of the debate about policy direction over the past five years has been so sterile and often polarized. For what it’s worth, I believe that if certain values and principles are important, then they should apply to everyone. It’s why I’m a fan of a National Curriculum which is just that – a curriculum that is nationally applied across schools. If



we believe in passing on to youngsters the best that has been thought and said, then why would we deny it for some youngsters? Why would we leave provision at the whim of school leaders and governors, some of whom may have skewed views of what a child should learn? Few countries, I suggest, believe something as important as what we teach children should be left to the lottery of who your head and governors happen to be.

And so it is with teaching. No wonder we are facing the biggest teacher recruitment crisis in more than a generation. As the Department scrambles to try to put together yet another marketing campaign for the profession, they once again miss the point. This time they intend to present case-studies of teachers – yes, humble classroom teachers – earning up to £60K, in the hope that this will entice the nation’s brightest minds to come and be a teacher.

## Geoff Barton (cont)

Once again, it's an utterly mechanistic view of teaching – that we are motivated by money rather than the inspiring possibilities of working with other professionals on a mission to educate the next generation. If any career lends itself to feeling we are doing something that has rewards beyond the merely financial, it's teaching. But on this Government's watch, it has for too long become a joyless job. The 2010 White Paper was called 'The Importance of Teaching'. In fact it heralded a spate of curriculum, qualification and structural reforms which have done little to encourage improvements in teaching quality. Indeed, they may have hampered it.

Because we are living through a visionless period doesn't mean that we should have no vision. Now is the time for teacher unions and associations, subject groups, and the huge network of teachers brought together through social media to strengthen our resolve about the conditions that lead to great teaching, the principles and practices that will revive a great profession.

The 2016 White Paper adds little. The opportunities lay there for the taking, of course – the chance to focus on high quality teacher training, linked to a high quality university department, so that the sense of developing a teacher's expertise was central from the outset. There was the possibility to incentivise new teachers to stay in the profession, and to stem the five-year career haemorrhage, by putting professional development at the heart of career development, giving teachers who have cut their teeth a chance to engage in research projects, or mini-secondments to other schools, or access to built-in mentoring. There was the opportunity to have a nationally-approved career development programme, so that teachers wishing to develop their expertise further could do so without feeling that school management was the only route on offer for their progression. There was the opportunity for longer-serving teachers to refresh their skills through online projects, conferences, some kind of education MOT, and perhaps opportunities for international study.

There was a chance, in other words, to develop a real sense of teacher as a career in which the profile of year five looks different from year one, and where the expectations of year 10 look different again.

There was a chance to make it a master's profession, one in which academic excellence went hand-in-hand with professional development. This would be an approach that viewed teachers not as 'deliverers' of a curriculum, not performing dogs jumping through someone else's hoops. It would be a commitment to teacher expertise. It would be a genuine commitment to 'the importance of teaching'.

Instead we have a White Paper that's thin on any underpinning philosophy, timid in its ambition for the profession, confused about why great teaching matters. That's why the recruitment crisis in teaching is so profound and morale so bleak.

But the older we get, the more we are reminded – as poetry and proverbs tell us – that 'these times shall pass'. Because we are living through a visionless period doesn't mean that we should have no vision. Now is the time for teacher unions and associations, subject groups, and the huge network of teachers brought together through social media to strengthen our resolve about the conditions that lead to great teaching, the principles and practices that will revive a great profession. Politicians come and go. Young people do too – but the difference is that they need teachers with the collective self-belief to do what is right for students, and to be more resistant of policy whims and diktats.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Michael Wilshaw recently called for more mavericks in schools. Let's translate that into practice – and in doing so create a mission for teaching that says no to gimmickry and puts real learning firmly at the heart of our work.

Let's reassert the right, the privilege, to show that when it comes to teaching and learning, teachers are - proudly and resolutely - experts.

**Geoff Barton is headteacher of King Edward VI School, a comprehensive school in Suffolk**

# The government's attack on national pay and conditions

Kevin Courtney

The government's Education White Paper and its proposed Education for All Bill continue to show they have the wrong priorities for teachers, schools and children. As more schools become academies, the effect of the national School Teachers' Pay and Conditions document and the Burgundy Book will narrow and these protections will gradually wither away. Many teachers may never have seen these two documents before, but will certainly have relied on their provisions during their career – whether it's for maternity, paternity or adoption leave; whether it's the 195 days' limit on the school year or the protections on cover and PPA time: all those and much, much more are in these two documents.

Now they are massively at risk. Whether a school is an academy, a free school or local authority school, the protections that come from those documents are seriously under threat. Both these documents apply statutorily in local authority schools and most academies follow them. That means teachers can rely on their protections and even take some entitlements from one school to another.

Part of the government's forced academies programme is to remove the protections of these documents altogether, so that no longer in the future would teachers maternity pay, the length of the school year, a pay rise be determined nationally. Instead, they would be determined by multi-academy trust chief executives and board—a board with no local authority appointees and, likely, no elected parent governors or staff governors. It means up to 20,000 school leaderships and their staff, or 4,000 academy trust leaders, focussing on negotiations instead of teaching and learning.

It is not as if there isn't already flexibility at school level – there is already scope for recruitment and retention payments for example. But the notion of determining the entire pay and conditions system at school or MAT level is incredibly inefficient. Fire fighters don't have their pay determined at the fire station. Police officers



don't have their pay determined at the police station. Even Tesco's managers don't determine pay and conditions at store level. Why do it to schools, when there is no evidence it leads to better education?

Fire fighters don't have their pay determined at the fire station. Police officers don't have their pay determined at the police station. Even Tesco's managers don't determine pay and conditions at store level. Why do it to schools, when there is no evidence it leads to better education?

## Kevin Courtney (cont)

Without a national pay system of some sort, the government couldn't even advertise a starting rate for the job, making it harder to recruit. Young people considering the profession would have no good idea of what terms and conditions might be ...

And worse, this deregulation coming in at a time of the most severe cuts schools have faced since the 1970s — the biggest real terms cuts for decades. Real term cuts in funding will have major effects on schools and teachers, whether academy or maintained. This will further erode terms and conditions, increase workload and impede pay progression for teachers.

If you deregulate and cut at the same time, there is only one thing that will happen to terms and conditions – they will get worse. Let's remember that teachers' working conditions are the same as our students' learning conditions. No other country in the world, no other high performing education system, has deregulated teachers' pay and conditions in this way. There is absolutely no evidence that this sort of deregulation leads to higher standards and that is why the NUT is now embarking on the most serious campaign it can to defend teachers' pay and conditions.

The NUT is balloting members in England in all schools, academies and local authority schools. It will not be a strike against academies. It will be a strike for the terms and conditions of teachers who work in academies and who work in local authority schools. We are seeking a guarantee from the Government that the protections in these documents continue to apply in all academies and in local authority schools which convert to academy status in the future, so that they are there for all teachers. We are also demanding that the government reverses the cuts and increase funding for schools, so that terms and conditions do not get worse and can be improved.

No teacher takes strike action lightly but this is a fight for our profession and the hard fought for rights of

teachers. If the Government is allowed to continue with its erosion of teachers pay and working conditions the teacher shortages we are experiencing at the moment will pale into insignificance. This will have a disastrous effect on children's education. Already class sizes are increasing, with subjects being taught by non-specialists or unqualified teachers.

Teachers are professionals. They need to be treated as such. The profession needs to be attractive to graduates who have a choice of what career they pursue.

Without a national pay system of some sort, the government couldn't even advertise a starting rate for the job, making it harder to recruit. Young people considering the profession would have no good idea of what terms and conditions might be until they know, at the end of their training, what school they are working in. Teachers will be increasingly sceptical about moving school on the basis of the 'better the devil you know' and especially at a time when budgets are falling. Will maternity rights be respected? What will the sick pay arrangements be? Will there be an extended probationary period? All these matters will be decided at academy trust level along with very many more terms and conditions. It is much more efficient for the school system to have clearly understood terms and conditions.

It is for teachers and the future of our children's education that the NUT is having to take a stand against this White Paper and this Government. Enough is Enough.

**Kevin Courtney is the Acting General Secretary of NUT**

# English schools — the essential myth-buster

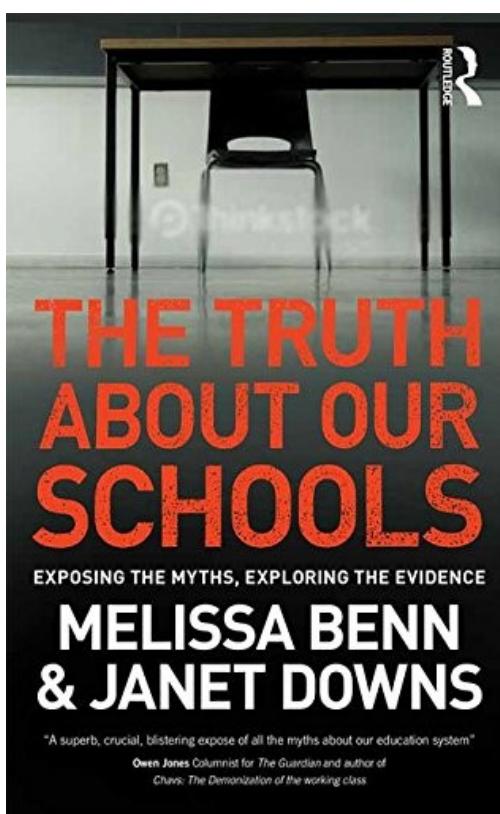
## A review of *The Truth About Our Schools*, by Melissa Benn and Janet Downs

Ever been at a party or in the pub and confronted by someone spouting nonsense about the state of our schools? Of course you have. Ever been frustrated at knowing that all the evidence is against the spouter but not quite being able to bring it to mind? Oh yes. What we could do with is a little book with all the killer facts about each of the most frequently spouted bits of nonsense.

Look no further. Those helpful people at the Local Schools Network, led by Melissa Benn and Janet Downs, have done the work for us. This slim (good for the handbag) but vital volume is sub-titled 'Exposing the myths, exploring the evidence', and indeed the seven most common myths are taken apart. Comprehensively. Starting with that big whopper, that comprehensive education has failed, the book moves through local authority 'control' of schools, how choice and competition produce success, academies raise standards, teachers don't need qualifications, the magic DNA of private schools (of course, there is one — parental wealth and connections), and ends with the perennial progressive teaching lowers standards.

As we all know, it's not enough to have the killer facts. In your dialogue with the spouter, your facts are described as assertions. You need not just facts, but authoritative facts. Benn and Downs oblige. Right from the start, when the narrative goes 'early selection doesn't work', 'who says so', 'the OECD, that's who', we get a string of top sources, from unimpeachable academics to utterly impeachable but influential Tories. On the comprehensive question, we also get right-wing journalist Simon Jenkins, right-wing policy wonk Sam Freedman, *The Financial Times*, and

Britain's foremost sociologist of social class, John Goldthorpe, together with others of whom admittedly it might be said 'they would say that, wouldn't they'. A demolition of the current nonsense about social mobility is particularly helpful. It is difficult to see a way in which anyone could deny the information in this chapter — though Graham Brady, MP for Altrincham and Sale West, would certainly continue to have a go.



And on we go, page after page, fact after fact, chapter after chapter. It's pleasing to see the chapter on Choice, Competition and Markets following the TUC's 2014 report 'Education not for Sale'. It's brave to have a pop at parental choice, although here again the OECD comes in handy. You might think academies and private schools are easy targets, but again you will be reassured by the wealth of quotable stuff gathered together.

There is just one unavoidable problem with this kind of reference book. While the arguments on issues like selection, teacher professionalism and pedagogy change little, in England the processes of privatisation and marketisation continue to develop at pace. Sad to say, some of the chapters needed updating almost before the book was published. There

have been many discussions about establishing a unit to monitor developments in this area, but no resources have been identified. Organisations such as Local Schools Network and the Anti-Academy Alliance do wonders considering their reliance on volunteers, but there is a particular gap in keeping up with edubusiness in this country. The question has to be asked, if the teacher unions could merge, would economies of scale free up enough resources to enable the kind of material in this book to be continuously updated?

# Beyond The Fringe

## Christine Newman and Emma Hardy

No conference is complete without its fringe meetings and for the first time SEA was present at some teacher union conferences at Easter.

At the NUT conference in Brighton, despite the stiff competition from other educational groups, a fringe meeting organised jointly by the NUT Labour Teachers group and SEA was well attended. The educationalists present were concerned that the seemingly endless political interference from governments in the professional life of teachers has done little to improve the real quality of children's and young people's education.

At this fringe meeting with a difference, the event centred around the attendees. People were seated at round tables, where they were asked to consider one of the following questions, 'what's the deal' a] for children and young people, b] for society, c] for teachers and education workers? One thing was clear from the report back session, there was no shortage of creative proposals/ideals for a better state educational system, from professionals who should be listened to and consulted more by politicians.

Members felt strongly the need to campaign to reclaim the curriculum and make it more broad and balanced. They felt that children are increasingly over tested and the workload involved for staff was excessive. The present curriculum is too reliant on high stakes testing and league tables so they should be abolished, as it creates among other things, unnecessary high levels of anxiety among children and staff.

There is no doubt that members understandably objected to education privatisation and forced academisation because of the financial irregularities that have been reported, the employment of 'corporate heads' on inflated salaries while the use of unqualified teachers continues to increase. This has led to the undermining of the unions' commitment to a graduate profession protected by the teachers' national pay and conditions.

Now we learn that parental influence on schools is to be marginalised but members wanted to develop community campaigns with these parents and governors, in order to reclaim a more egalitarian, fully funded, locally accountable state education system. Many members present felt the time was right to work even more collaboratively with other teacher unions. In addition, with Jeremy Corbyn's election victory and the way he and his parliamentary supporters are prepared to listen, now is the time to discuss our ideas with them.

Following this success, the SEA banner moved up to Liverpool for the ATL conference. In an equally crowded programme, the SEA meeting attracted a smaller but highly engaged crowd—but the lunch was better, courtesy of ATL!

The format was similar to the NUT event. So were the outcomes of the table discussions on the same questions. Delegates from the so-called moderate ATL were equally angry about their current experiences in their working lives, and particularly the workload required for school accountability that has no benefits for the pupils they teach. They were angry about the effects on pupils of the narrow curriculum and the pressures from external tests and test preparation.

Following the reports from the table discussions, at this event a panel of speakers were invited to respond. John Bolt, SEA General Secretary, outlined his interpretation of the just-published White Paper [See p8-9 for this].

Peter Pendle, Deputy General Secretary of ATL, described how the union's positions were in accord with the views expressed by the attendees. He noted the publication by the government of three advice notes on teacher workload, which had been drafted by working groups including union representatives. While ATL would promote them to members, he said, it was up to union members in their workplaces to ensure their implementation.

The final speaker was Julie Reid, Chair of Scrutiny for Children and Young People at Manchester City Council. Speaking with great passion, Julie effectively endorsed a range of SEA policies, including an end to selection. She argued that the new leadership of the Labour Party presented an opportunity to lobby for the adoption of more traditional Labour education policies. Delegates hurried off to their afternoon professional development sessions with plenty to think about.

SEA Executive will be reviewing the innovation of teacher union fringe meetings. Already they have resulted in new active members and may well be worth repeating.

**Christine Newman is Chair of SEA Cymru and a member of NUT**

**Emma Hardy is the incoming Deputy General Secretary of SEA**

You still have time to book a place!

## SEA AGM and Annual Conference

Saturday 25th June (AGM 10am, Conference 11am to 5pm)

Student Central, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY

### Speakers:

Mary Bousted, General Secretary of ATL

John Holmwood, Campaign for the Public University

Liz Lawrence, President of UCU

Jules Pipe, Mayor of Hackney

Sorana Vieru NUS Vice-President (Higher Education)

Catherine West MP (Hornsey and Wood Green)

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### Other forthcoming events

26th June 11am, London: SEA Executive

25th—28th September, Liverpool: Labour Party Conference (SEA delegate, Sarah Williams)

12th November, London: Reclaiming Education Conference celebrating comprehensive education

15th November, House of Commons, London: Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture: speaker, Danny Dorling

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