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Towards a National Education Service

Editorial

There are about 2,365,000 EU Nationals working in Britain. There are limited options for employers if it turns out they need to replace them: improving pay and conditions to attract UK workers; automation; diversification; relocation abroad; or closing the business. But the one favoured in many quarters is to train up the British workforce to the necessary levels to take on skilled jobs.

There is just one problem with that solution. According to surveys, only one in ten employers in the UK would even consider training UK nationals to replace their EU staff. Other surveys in recent months show that 70% of employers don't read the papers because they expect to continue to recruit from the EU over the next year. And the amount of workplace training has halved in the last 20 years.

This is the background to the horrendous crisis in vocational education and training in this country. No VET system can work without the support of employers, and it certainly cannot work after suffering a level of cuts which will leave resources where they were 30 years ago. And to compound the crisis, the Sainsbury review will take us down the wrong curriculum and qualifications path over the next few years.

The present government is busy exploring la-la-land, so it is up to Labour to produce a VET policy. At the same time, the government's schools policies continue to unravel. The ill-considered changes to the exam system may well lead eventually to a fatal undermining of public confidence in their methodology. The methodology of school inspections has already been undermined by Ofsted's own evidence on their reliability; the lack, that is. And almost every week another academy scandal highlights the failure of a privatisation approach to our schools, which must be seen by Labour as a key community resource. This government has left a vacuum in intelligent policymaking.

Yet it is not yet clear that Labour is ready to fill that vacuum. This edition reprints (pp18-19) the relevant section of the National Policy Forum 2017 report. Underwhelming. True, the NPF process was rudely interrupted by the election, but we need a more precise bearing than provided by this document, or indeed by the 2017 manifesto.

On the positive side, the manifesto commitment to a National Education Service does open the door to new thinking, and this edition considers some of the issues it raises. Let us be clear: the whole of our education and

training system is out of date and requires radical review. We should start to plan the NES with a blank canvas, considering the demographic realities we face as well as the real needs of the 21st century economy. Here are some of the questions which require our attention.

Can this be the time we stop being an international outlier with regard to the starting age of formal schooling? Labour must see the early years as an education issue as well as a care issue and reinstate nursery schooling as a distinct stage.

The NES will be about people and communities, not about schools and colleges or education business. Is this then an opportunity for school admissions to be planned on that basis?

As *EP* has repeatedly argued, the NES must review both the curriculum and qualifications in our schools and colleges. The question of whether we need an expensive and irrelevant exam at 16+ will be on that agenda, as well as the need for a comprehensive and broad curriculum post-16.

What should be the role of and provision for youth services, currently under threat from the ever greater pressure on local authority finances?

As discussed in this edition, the NES must review the provision of further and higher education and the requirements of society and the economy for both.

And lastly but by no means least, how can the lives of adults, including older adults, be enhanced by expanded learning opportunities?

All of these questions require Labour to think boldly and creatively, using the huge reservoir of experience and knowledge held by a range of people who are sympathetic to the Party. Yes, the blank canvas is a very large one, but with such a resource the Party should be equal to the task. The one condition which may be missing is the authority and drive of the front bench of the PLP towards new thinking. It is up to the membership to encourage our leaders to have the courage to put new flesh on the exciting skeleton of a National Education Service.

Subject to decisions of the SEA NEC, *EP 133* is the last under my editorship, which began with *EP 122*. I have enjoyed this role but *EP* needs a fresh look and I need fresh challenges. I am certain the SEA will continue to increase in membership, activity and influence and I await with anticipation the implementation of the NES by a Labour government.

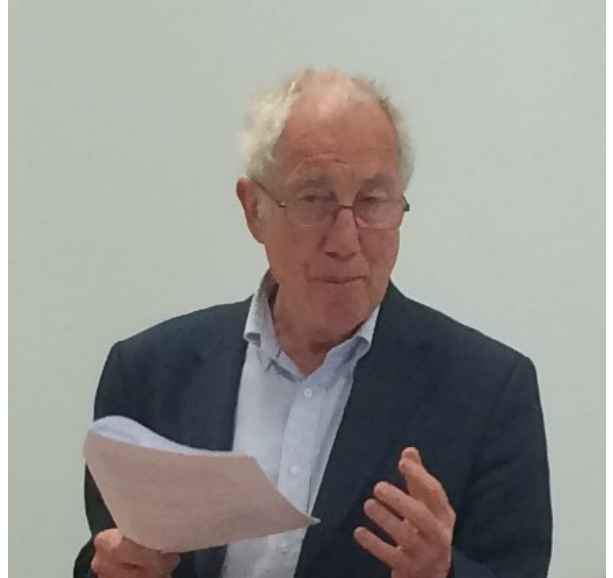
Martin Johnson

SEA has a new President

John Bolt

After nine years' service Professor Richard Pring has decided to retire as President of the SEA. It does need to be said that retirement has rather a different meaning for Richard than for most of us. He was Director of the Oxford Department of Education until 2003. Since then he's led the ground breaking Nuffield Review of 14 to 19 education, written more books and articles than you can count, has continued to teach in English universities and to work with universities abroad.

Richard has offered SEA a unique historical perspective on education and politics drawing on experience in a range of educational and government roles and a memory of the days before education became a political football. His commitment to the comprehensive ideal and to the promotion of equality through education remains as strong as ever as is his critique of much current practice and policy. He will be greatly missed as our President but we hope very much to continue to enjoy his contributions to our debates in the future.



Richard Pring speaking at a recent SEA conference



Selina Todd

As our new President, we are delighted to welcome Selina Todd, Professor of Modern History at Oxford. Her academic specialisms are the study of class, inequality, working-class history, feminism and women's lives. Her most recent major work was the acclaimed bestseller "The People: the Rise and Fall of the Working Class 1910 to 2010". In 2014 she delivered the SEA's Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture on "The Golden Age of the Grammar School: Exploding the Myth". The lecture can be read at

https://sosedassoc.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/cbml_2014.pdf

More recently, in a Social History Society Lecture (see EP 132), Selina launched a long overdue assault on the current fixation with social mobility as a central aim of state education, arguing rather that "social mobility reinforces social inequality" and that "the social mobility agenda has been lamentably unambitious. Its focus on the talented few offers no hope for the many". We look forward to many more such powerful contributions to educational debate in the years to come.

John Bolt is the General Secretary of the SEA

Towards a National Education Service

For the many, not the few is an unexpected publishing hit – a party manifesto still being reprinted three months after the election. For the SEA, one of its more intriguing provisions was for the NES. It stated:

Labour will create a unified National Education Service (NES) for England to move towards cradle-to-grave learning that is free at the point of use. The NES will be built on the principle that ‘Every Child – and Adult Matters’ and will incorporate all forms of education, from early years through to adult education.

When Jeremy Corbyn wrote about it two years ago, he emphasised access to adult learning mainly as a vehicle for improved skills for work, with anticipated economic benefits. But there has been very little flesh put on those bones since. Consequently, there has been plenty of speculation, much at the level of what kind of thing it will be. This edition of *Education Politics* contains a series of contributions from representatives of education services beyond compulsory schooling, to stimulate the debate now getting under way in earnest.

The NES is frequently compared with the NHS in terms of entitlement. But the comparison should perhaps not be taken too far. The NHS is one of the largest partly public sector organisations in the world but it would be dwarfed if the NES became a single organisation. It may be more useful to think of it not as an organisation but as an organising principle to be applied to a large number of structures providing education and training, together with arrangements for transition and access, and a plan to prioritise and ration spending between them.

It will be important to be clear and realistic about funding. Whatever the Party’s economic and fiscal policies are when next in government, no Chancellor can allow a limitless commitment to spend on any public service. There is no reason why a Labour government could not increase public spending using increases in tax and closing loopholes, particularly on businesses, but there is every reason to prioritise the services that could be provided by whatever amount is budgeted. As Aneurin Bevan famously said, ‘*The language of priorities is the religion of socialism*’, and a reassessment of the relative priority given to early years, primary, secondary, youth, FHE and training, and adult education must form a part of the debate. The recent Institute for Fiscal Studies report, *Long-Run Comparisons of Spending per Pupil across Different Stages of Education*

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8937>

takes us some way to understanding the spend on each sector, but interestingly it does not mention youth services and does not cover the over 21s: ‘*We focus on ...pupils or students aged between 3 and 21 because attributing spending to individual pupils outside these ages becomes increasingly hard.*’

The IFS shows that:

- *since 2010–11, spending on Sure Start and support through working tax credit have each fallen by more than 30% in real terms...*
- *in schools, spending per pupil is expected to fall by 6.5% in real terms between 2015–16 and 2019–20... This will be the first time schools have seen real-terms cuts in spending per pupil since the mid 1990s.*
- *16–18 education has been the big loser from education spending changes over the last 25 years. Spending on further education fell faster during the 1990s, grew more slowly in the 2000s, and has been the only major area of education spending to see cuts since 2010. Spending per student in 16–18 education is set to fall further between 2015–16 and 2019–20, leaving spending per student at a similar level in real terms to that 30 years previously. ...This long-run, and continuing, squeeze in resources in 16–18 education poses significant challenges for the sector as a whole.*

The IFS concludes: *Overall, the picture of government spending on education has changed significantly over the last 25 years, with the focus of spending shifting towards earlier in youngsters’ lives. Most stages of education have seen significant real-terms increases in spending per pupil over this period, with 16–18 education a notable exception. However, the spending cuts expected in the coming years present a challenge to continuing to provide high-quality education at every stage.*

There is a longstanding policy debate on whether spending more per learner at each successive stage of education is the best use of resources. There is little doubt that the funding crisis in early years provision is more serious than the schools crisis, and there is a widespread view that a higher spend on quality provision at that stage saves money later.

All the contributors discuss funding. Sally Hunt and Pam Tatlow both take up the disparities in funding between FE and HE. Tatlow examines the sleight of

Towards a National Education Service (cont)

hand of the Treasury in disguising the true costs of the student loan scheme, and writes, *'It is difficult to see how the current system supports social justice, the reskilling of those in the adult workforce who did not obtain level 3 qualifications during their secondary education or those who want to return to education for its own sake as adult learners.'* One question here is whether the very large spend on HE relative to all other stages of education is appropriate. It is not clear that social justice is served by the relatively low priority of all levels of FE, or indeed whether the large increase in student numbers in HE rather than FE meets wider social and economic policy aims. Such funding questions, and many more, would need to be considered and resolved as the NES develops.

However, these are not the only questions to be faced in the development phase. The wholesale marketisation of education services has led to counter-productive fragmentation and loss of democratic oversight not only within each service but between services. As Chris Butcher writes: *A national strategy only becomes meaningful if it is translated into practice and currently there is too little interaction between the different parts of the education sector. A national framework which encouraged shared use of facilities and resources and which enabled better signposting and referral to meet the needs of each individual learner would lead local education providers to direct resources to where communities most need them.*

This highlights a number of issues. One is the question of how learners move from phase to phase. There is little doubt that the School Admissions Code is presently drafted for a marketised school system. In the NES, admissions to primary, secondary and upper secondary education should meet the needs of learners, their families and the community on the basis of a comprehensive provision. The transitions at 16+ and 18+ should also be enhanced by a professional system of Information, Advice and Guidance as advocated by Sally Hunt, which must have broken free from elitist perspectives on post-compulsory learning.

Another issue is the whole status and function of HE. With its leadership adopting ever more businesslike approaches, and (with exceptions) its tendency to isolation from local communities, the sector must be open to a radical review, not least since in 2016 the sector had a surplus of £1.5 billion and held reserves of £23.9 billion (after taking into account pension liabilities). Not all attacks on the status quo in HE can

be characterised successfully as assaults on academic freedom. In some societies, admission to HE has been by nomination of the governing political party; this may not suit English sensitivities, but it is time to think out of the box about the needs of society and the economy as well as individuals for the provision of HE, relative to FE and other post-compulsory training, and how the sector can become an integral part of a unified system.

The same question, how demand for post-compulsory education can be managed, must be considered for other sectors. If all provision is to be free to users, how can the amount of provision be planned? Clearly, in most post-compulsory education, pre-entry qualifications will be necessary. But how would that work for adult leisure classes, for example?

As Butcher suggests, a unified system requires co-ordination, and that requires democratically controlled local or regional bodies. It is difficult to conceive of the NES without some such structures. Take buildings. In the NES, school, college and university buildings would be a community resource; all the activities of play-centre, youth and evening adult classes, and more, would continue to take place there without complex contractual arrangements.

When Bevan created the NHS, political circumstances dictated that he was required to bend towards the medical profession. This was one reason why it developed more as a national illness service than a health service which would have had due regard to public and personal health enhancement programmes. The schools lobby certainly does not have the clout to match the BMA of the 1940s, but Labour must take care to prevent the NES debate becoming schools plus. Of course England's schools are suffering a large variety of problems, but so are all other sectors of education and training, and many problems are suffered in common. This edition of *EP* deliberately avoids the issues of school funding, accountability, learner assessment, and staff workload which fixate some Labour Party members who work in the sector. They matter, but the NES is not about them. The NES must be about the learning progress of people throughout their lives and the structures we need to support that. In a National Education Service, all staff must be prepared to see the bigger picture, how their own sector fits with others, and how all sectors must work together for the benefit of the nation's learners of all ages.

MJ

The NES: ending sheep and goats in FHE?

Pam Tatlow

Labour's pledge of free university tuition clearly struck a chord in the 2017 general election campaign – so much so that Ministers and many self-appointed higher education gurus have subsequently spent a great deal of energy defending the current system of fees and funding in England while warning that free tuition would undermine progression to university from those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds as well as the country's finances. There is much more to say about the economic merits of these arguments and the claim that the £9k (and rising) fee system is 'progressive' – a claim that relies on massive sums in unpaid loans being written off by taxpayers.

In contrast, Labour's manifesto commitment to create a National Education Service (NES) on the lines of the NHS deserves more attention than it has so far received. The promise to develop opportunities for life-long learning in the context of an NES potentially opens the book on a new approach to further, higher and adult education and their funding. It also stands in sharp contrast to the approach adopted by the Conservative government which has favoured the application of market principles to the delivery of tertiary (i.e. post-secondary) education, the idea that students are consumers and replaced direct public investment in universities and colleges with indirect funding provided by student fees.

As a result, there has been no direct grant available for university courses in the arts, humanities, social sciences, computer science, design, architecture and economics courses – to name just a few of the subjects affected - since 2014-15. With a decrease in student numbers (demand fell after £9k fees were introduced in 2012), a requirement for universities to fund programmes previously supported by government, a decline in capital investment and an 80% cut in teaching grant, it is unsurprising that universities will charge the maximum £9,250 fee for courses commencing in 2017-18. Equally unsurprising, many students, graduates and their families appear to feel that they are unfairly picking up the tab for the costs of a higher and further education system which provides wider benefits to employers and non-monetised benefits to society at large.

Ministers cite an increase in the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds progressing to university at 18 as evidence of the success of their approach. This ignores the rising levels of graduate debt and the effect of the higher ticket price on part-time and mature students (not necessarily one and the same) whose numbers have declined significantly since the fee cap was raised in 2012. This has impacted

adversely on those, mainly modern, universities which have historically recruited a more inclusive student cohort by mode of study and age, and on individuals already in, or hoping to return to, the workforce with new skills and career options. The decline in mature student applications following the abolition of NHS bursaries for nursing, midwifery and other allied health professional courses in 2017-18 (programmes that have traditionally attracted older students including those from BAME backgrounds) is further evidence that a new and more holistic approach to life-long learning is long overdue.

But it is not just universities and higher education students that have been required to manage dramatic changes in their fees and funding regimes. Further education colleges have been subject to significant cuts, area reviews and mergers. Much less publicised but equally important has been the replacement of direct funding by student loans for many courses. Since 2011 direct investment in courses at level 3 and above has been cut for older learners who, if they are unable to pay fees upfront, have to take out an advanced learner loan if they want to continue their studies. For courses starting before 1st August 2016, this funding regime applied to students who wanted to study for a level 3 or 4 course when they were 24 or older. For those who became 19 after 1st August 2016, advanced learner loans have replaced direct funding for qualifications at levels 3, 4, 5 and 6, e.g. A Levels, BTECs or graduate certificates.

Limits have also been placed on the number of advanced learner loans, including by the application of a number of byzantine conditions. For example, prior to 1st August 2016, students could not take out another loan to take the same level of a course, for the same level qualification even though the course itself was different. Students who have taken out one advanced learner loan e.g. for one level 3 course and then want to study for a further qualification at the same level, are still required to make repayments on their first loan if their earnings exceed £21,000 pa. The only exception is Access to HE courses where loans for these courses are written off if the student successfully completes an undergraduate qualification.

The same terms and conditions of repayment and addition of interest now apply to both advanced learner and higher education loans. Prior to 2012, interest on loans taken out after 2006 was 3% plus CPI. Since 2012, new student loans have been subject to an interest rate of 3% plus RPI from the moment they are taken out. As a result, from September 2017, interest of up to a usurious rate of 6.1% will be applied.

Pam Tatlow (cont)

It is well-known that older students are more likely to come from a more disadvantaged demographic but individuals who want to step back onto the education ladder or commence their journeys into higher education when they are 19 or over by participating in level 3, A-level or other vocational courses, now incur greater debts than those who enter university aged 18. It is difficult to see how the current system supports social justice, the reskilling of those in the adult workforce who did not obtain level 3 qualifications during their secondary education or those who want to return to education for its own sake as adult learners.



The costs to students of higher education were further increased by George Osborne, then still Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his 2015 Summer Budget. According to Osborne, maintenance grants for full-time students were 'unaffordable' and were replaced by maintenance loans from the 2016-17 academic year. Labour's manifesto promised to

restore these grants but this change alone has affected nearly half the new undergraduate student population in England with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds coming off worse. As a minimum, debt on graduation from a three-year course will increase by an extra £13,500 (before interest) if full entitlement to maintenance loans is taken up. The switch from maintenance grants to loans will mean that students from the poorest 30% of households will repay an average of around £3,000 more overall (at 2016 prices).

If Labour's National Education Service is to promote fair access and life-long learning, it is imperative that it revisits the funding regimes that currently apply to students wherever, however (full-time or part-time) and at whatever age they study. This can only be achieved if the NES is underpinned by the return of direct investment in universities and colleges. This means that Labour will have to tackle head-on the arguments that have been used to justify the current funding system and the 'smoke and mirrors' accounting rules that have allowed Ministers to claim that the public funding of further, higher and adult education unfairly benefits those who participate at the expense of those who do not.

In fact, government accounting rules mean that reducing the direct, public funding of teaching in universities, colleges and adult education, and abolishing student maintenance grants, all cut the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement (PSBR) and thus the deficit. However, this is a sleight of hand because the government continues to borrow and use taxpayer resource to fund the Student Loan Company instead of universities and colleges. The SLC then lends money to students for fees and their maintenance support and in turn, they pay the course and tuition fees that universities and colleges have no option but to levy.

This money merry-go-round of indirect funding of further and higher education has the convenience of appearing to reduce the PSBR but in fact, adds to the cumulative net public debt requirement of the government. Inevitably, it increases the loans and debts of students and graduates and the likelihood that all taxpayers will write-off unpaid loans during and at the end of the 30-year repayment period. As MillionPlus warned before the 2010 parliamentary votes to increase the higher fee cap to £9,000:

Any gains made in reducing the deficit by withdrawing public funding for higher education will be cancelled out. In the long-term, taxpayers will pay much higher loan write-off costs than at present... the Exchequer will not generate significant savings, will need to borrow more and further the Government will create a more complex system with massive administrative burdens.

A new funding regime is key to fair access but Labour must also avoid supporting a system which divvies up education, qualifications and institutions into technical or academic as proposed by the Sainsbury review. A National Education Service should have no truck with the 'sheep and goats' mentality' by which students are directed into vocational or academic routes. This approach has bedevilled British education since 1944 and ignores the fact that many courses and qualifications, including those offered by modern universities, are professionally and technically focused and combine both the 'academic' and the 'vocational'. A National Education Service, underpinned by direct investment and the principle of collaboration rather than competition, has much to offer and huge potential to ensure that tertiary and adult education is accessible to all.

Pam Tatlow is Chief Executive of MillionPlus, the Association for Modern Universities

Building a National Education Service

Sally Hunt

The June election was unexpected and exciting in many ways, not least because education and skills was at the very centre of Labour's policy agenda. The Party set out an ambitious vision for a new National Education Service to mirror the health service - free at the point of use for all, regardless of age or background.

The policy tapped into growing concerns about the spiralling cost of post-compulsory education, and has reinvigorated long-running debates about what a fair and cohesive education system could and should look like.

The underpinning principles outlined in the manifesto are also supported by my union, the University and College Union (UCU): that education is a public good and should be publicly funded; that lifelong learning opportunities should be accessible to all; that cost – or fear of debt - should never be a barrier to participation; and that education should be delivered by a well-supported and highly trained professional workforce.

However, there has been relatively little detail on the practical underpinning required to produce a cohesive and easily navigable system of post-compulsory learning. As the Party seeks to develop its policy, where should its priorities be in moving towards an effective cradle-to-grave service?

Overhauling funding is a critical first step, not just in terms of delivering free access but also for increasing fairness across the education system.

UCU has long-standing policy calling for tuition fees in higher education to be scrapped. Instead, UCU believes that businesses should pay their fair share for the supply of skilled labour upon which they rely. The union advocates the introduction of a [Business Education Tax](#) to pay for UK higher education, raising corporation tax to cover the cost of abolishing fees and reinstating maintenance grants for higher education students.

Critics of Labour's policy have claimed that such a policy is unaffordable, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that cuts to corporation tax since 2010 have reduced revenues by at least £12.4bn. On this basis, returning corporation tax to 2010 levels would more than cover the full cost of restoring direct funding and maintenance support for higher education students.

The manifesto also set out plans to provide free lifelong learning opportunities for adults to retrain and upskill. This is a welcome pledge, and recognises the

need for individuals to be able to adapt and respond to the changing world of work. Often adults need short, sharp courses that meet a particular need rather than long, structured learning programmes like the apprenticeships which have been favoured by the Conservative government.

Directly funding further education is both progressive and economically sound. For every £1 of public money spent on further education, £25 is returned to the public purse. As well as making the principled argument for free education, we must continue to make the hard-headed economic case for greater direct investment in learning of this kind, which is crucial to the UK's wellbeing and productivity.



In a similar vein, the introduction of a National Education Service presents an ideal opportunity to bridge the historical funding gap between further and higher education. Analysis by [London Economics](#) for UCU showed that public funding associated with a full-time English undergraduate student stood at £8,870 in 2013/14, compared with just £1,323 for a non-apprentice further education student aged 19 or over. While the government has recently announced additional per-student funding to accompany the new T-levels when they are introduced in 2020, other areas of further education continue to be massively under-resourced.

To create a system which offers meaningful choice and places equal value on academic, technical and adult learning, we must ensure that all pathways are sustainably resourced and that the post-compulsory education sector remains attractive for staff to work in. That means strategic investment in building workforce capacity within the further and adult education sectors, which have borne the brunt of cuts in recent years. UCU

Sally Hunt (cont)

has called for investment in an additional 15,000 further education teachers to boost the sector's capacity. Action is also needed to tackle the issues of spiralling workloads and endemic casualisation that are common to all sectors of post-compulsory education.

Looking beyond funding, the development of a new National Education Service offers a chance to reform areas which currently aren't working as well as they could for social mobility and widening participation.

For instance, recent years have seen a marked decline in the quality and consistency of careers advice on offer to young people. Responsibility for careers advice has shifted to individual schools and colleges without any additional resource, and services like Connexions have closed. A [ComRes survey for UCU](#) in 2014 found that one in six (17%) young people from the poorest backgrounds reported having received no careers advice, compared to just 9% of those from more affluent backgrounds. Information, advice and guidance is vital for helping learners to navigate the complex landscape of learning opportunities available to them. A coherent national education system needs the support of dedicated and specially trained careers advisors to help people identify the merits of different pathways and make the right decisions to support their individual learning ambitions.

Reform of higher education admissions could also be transformative for social mobility. The current system of awarding university places based on predicted rather than actual achievement is deeply flawed.

Research by [Gill Wyness for UCU](#), published last year, revealed that only 16% of students have their grades predicted accurately, while three quarters (75%) of students were predicted higher grades than they went on to achieve. The same study showed that the most able students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds were the most likely to achieve higher grades than predicted.

Since the cap on student recruitment to higher education was lifted in 2015, the number of unconditional offers being made to potential students has skyrocketed. Universities competing for income in an increasingly marketised sector are piling pressure on young people to make commitments before they know how well they have actually performed.

In UCU's charter for fair admissions, we call for a switch to a system of post-qualification admissions (PQA), which would see places awarded on the basis of actual achievement rather than hopeful estimates. Seven in ten

(70%) staff working in higher education admissions surveyed by UCU in 2015 supported a move to PQA as a fairer and more transparent alternative to the current system, so this is something a Labour party seeking to promote fair access should consider.

Finally, the Labour manifesto set out an ambition to 'make lifelong learning a reality'. The National Education Service presents a real opportunity to embed a culture of learning and provide greater incentives for people to engage in learning activity which is not primarily focussed on employment as an outcome.

UCU has expressed support for lifetime learning accounts as a way to encourage people to take part in informal and community learning, which is known to have many wider personal, social and economic benefits. Each adult would have an account into which the state would pay an annual allowance, with options for employers and individuals to make additional tax free contributions. Then the individual could choose when and how to spend that money on the learning of interest and benefit to them.

Although similar initiatives such as Individual Learning Accounts have undoubtedly had some issues in the past, mainly due to lack of appropriate regulation, the overarching principle is a sound one. Schemes of this nature are operated successfully in several other countries including Austria, Germany and Denmark. Something similar in the UK could help establish a habit of regular engagement in education throughout people's lives.

Creating a seamless system which does away with unnecessary barriers to engagement and truly fosters a culture of learning throughout life is a hugely complex task, and these are just a few of the many areas for consideration as policy on the National Education Service is developed. Many more questions remain; for example, how will a national service work with the increasing devolution of skills in city regions? Nonetheless, with a bold and expansive vision, the National Education Service has the potential to become a real national treasure in its own right.

**Sally Hunt is the General Secretary of
University and College Union**

Adult Education in a National Education Service

Chris Butcher

Labour's manifesto for the June 2017 General Election contained several significant pledges on lifelong learning as well as the overarching idea of establishing a National Education Service. The manifestos of both the Liberal Democrat and the Conservative parties also included pledges on lifelong learning.

When only a couple of years ago the WEA and others were campaigning to save Adult Education funding - awaiting a major cut to the national budget which was averted but only just - does this herald a bright new dawn for adult learning with all the main Westminster parties getting behind it and seeing its value?

The answer has to be, not entirely. It was encouraging to see so many references to adult or lifelong learning in the manifestos - but it was notable that there were far fewer references in the surrounding debates and campaigns. Since the election it has been similarly low profile as a topic in political and policy circles. Where adult learning is referred to it is nearly always in the context of apprenticeships and skills directly for employment - important components of lifelong learning certainly but failing to recognise its contribution to wellbeing, community cohesion or other wider outcomes. Adult education improves the lives of individuals but the sector (and certainly the WEA's work) is also built on a long and still significant tradition of community organising, partnership with local charities and other allies and a network of volunteers and supporters which all adds up to a sizeable (but often unheralded) social movement.

Last year, the All Party Parliamentary Group for Adult Education (chaired by Chi Onwurah MP) commissioned a report from the Institute for Employment Research at Warwick University. The report was published as *Adult Education: Too Important To Be Left To Chance* and one of its five recommendations was for a national strategy for adult education. Labour's idea of a National Education Service provides a useful starting point to discuss why such a strategy could be effective.

First of all, it recognises that learning is a 'cradle to grave' activity. People never stop learning but for many people, learning is something they do formally in their youth and then they may or may not align their acquisition of knowledge and experience with any structured support or guidance thereafter. This inevitably leads to enormous inconsistency and an inequality of opportunity which results in the UK adult population having some of the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy in the developed world.

An education strategy which properly incorporates adult learning could lead to more structured and consistent support for learners of all ages and at all points in their life. Greater interaction between policy makers and practitioners in all forms of education would be encouraged and the emphasis would be on the learner's needs and the best way of supporting continuity and consistency of opportunity throughout life.

Since the first reshuffle of Theresa May's government in the autumn of 2016, the structures in Whitehall have in fact offered the opportunity for precisely such a joined up approach. Prior to that reshuffle, adult education funding and policy resided in the (then) Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, separated from all other support for schools, universities and colleges. By bringing the responsibility back to the Department for Education, the opportunity is there to make closer links between policy, practice and funding for education provision of all types, which a national strategy could facilitate.



A national strategy only becomes meaningful if it is translated into practice and currently there is too little interaction between the different parts of the education sector. A national framework which encouraged shared use of facilities and resources and which enabled better signposting and referral to meet the needs of each individual learner, would lead local education providers to direct resources to where communities most need them.

Better linkage of education provision at local and regional level would, however, also necessitate a re-balancing of funding at national level. The current budget for adult education stands at £1.5bn out of a total Department for Education annual budget of close to £60bn. Education funding has always been front-loaded to support statutory schooling for young people, and it's easy to see why and difficult to imagine a

Chris Butcher (cont)

different model. There is, however, a case to be made for using the current budget in a smarter way and in arguing for an overall increase to allow for better support for education at all ages and not just for the young. Imagine a health service which provided statutory support to the age of 18 and then left people to make their own arrangements. If education is also a right then, like health, it must be supported more evenly throughout the whole population. A National Education Service which mirrors the National Health Service would need to reflect that.

A way of expanding resources and budgets – at national, regional or local level – is to recognise the wider impact of adult education and hence the possibility of combining funding resources and aligning them with multiple outcomes. A national education strategy (or NES) should not sit in splendid isolation but should connect to national strategies on issues such as mental health, citizenship and community cohesion as well as skills and employment.

Each year the Workers' Educational Association conducts a survey of its students to ask what difference attending WEA courses has made. Amongst the most striking results from the most recent one: 81% of students met people on courses that they would not normally mix with and half said they felt they had more understanding of other cultures. Alongside other health and wellbeing benefits, 59% of students reported that the courses helped them to reduce stress. Students became more active in their communities - 21% became involved in voluntary activities; 30 % of those who were unemployed and looking for work before starting their course got a new job.

If impact such as this were recognised and scaled up through a National Education Service which made the appropriate links with departments (and their budgets) outside the education sector, then adult learning could be mainstreamed as an essential part of the nation's fabric.

Part of the reason for the WEA's wider impact is that we deliver most of our provision in partnership with local (and national) organisations, again sometimes from outside of the education world. Often these are trusted and well known service providers in other sectors (such as health or employment) who are already supporting our students in other ways. This recognises that student's needs are not compartmentalised and that learning provision could and should sit alongside other community services. Here the benefits of a National Education Service would be to have a consistent national framework which could be adapted to local

needs and which would be visible to those from other sectors looking for forge links.

More importantly it would provide a clearer route map for adult learners to find entry points to the education system that are relevant and timely. It is common to hear students say that they only fell into adult education by chance – referred by a friend or happening on a leaflet in a local library – and not always at the time they needed it most. Once there, they often find the experience beneficial, life changing even. No wonder the Warwick University report was entitled *Too Important To Be Left To Chance*. A national service or strategy would level out that element of chance and provide something more consistent, accessible and visible. The current system favours certain entry routes – most obviously apprenticeships – over others and I have already mentioned how provision is massively skewed towards younger people. A true national service – serving the whole population – would promote multiple entry routes and maximise flexibility to the benefit of the learner.

This could be underpinned by new financial support mechanisms for students such as a new exploration of vouchers or learning accounts (perhaps like those proposed in the Liberal Democrat manifesto or learning from the experience of the scheme introduced in the Labour administration). Ideally these would offer transportable and deferrable financial support to adult learners through a mechanism which does not disadvantage them and which allows for government, employers or others to contribute.

The cross-party appeal of an idea such as learning accounts shows, as the manifestos did, that all parties are starting to explore improvements in adult learning. The level of need and the still precarious nature of the current level of provision requires a more accelerated approach however. Adult learning can no longer be the afterthought or the exception in education policy and funding. It needs to be a mainstreamed, integral and consistent part of a national strategy. A big idea such as the National Education Service would be incomplete without it and one hopes that its inclusion will inspire champions of all political persuasions to start thinking of lifelong learning as an essential part of the future wellbeing of our economy and our society.

Chris Butcher is Research and Public Policy Officer at the Workers' Educational Association

Youth Work in a national education system

Robin Konieczny

The place of youth work in a National Education System is an interesting question. As things have played out since 2010 it would appear that youth work does not feature within the education system. During this period responsibility for youth work at a governmental level has moved from the Department of Education to the Cabinet Office and now sits with Sport and Culture. And yet, it could be argued that for many young people our education system fails to prepare them for the world that lies ahead for them. Education is more than learning topics such as Mathematics and English, but should be about learning for life.

As Ken Robinson said in his widely viewed lecture for TED (the Technology, Entertainment and Design Foundation), 'Do schools kill creativity?', every education system in the world has one thing in common; they place maths, the native language and science at the top of the list of priority subjects with arts and culture at the bottom. The place of youth work and informal education is likely to be not on the list at all and yet youth work plays a vital role for many young people in making the transition from childhood to adulthood and in helping them to become rounded, grounded individuals.

So what is youth work? It has its basis in social education and shares its values and ethics with the European tradition of social pedagogy. It is a humanistic approach based on the following values:

- every human being deserves respect
- every human being is unique
- every human being has a right to think
- every human being has emotions and dreams
- every human being takes responsibilities.

Youth work is a voluntary social interaction, which starts from where young people are at, and supports young people to navigate their world. Young people choose to engage with youth workers rather than being required to as in statutory education systems or the care system. Youth work focuses on the social education of young people. Youth workers play a critical role in supporting young people's understanding of the world around them. This includes helping young people to understand personal relationships with families and friends, developing their sexuality, understanding equality, cultural and gender issues, helping to address mental health, stress and anxiety issues, raising awareness of drugs and alcohol, promoting wellness and supporting spiritual understanding.

The Thompson report in the 1980s highlighted the 3 'E's, Empowerment, Education and Equality, and the Crick Report in 1998 set out the need for citizenship education and the role of youth work to promote 'active citizenship'. Even the last government continued policy development with its paper 'Positive for Youth'. With its focus on the development of youth voice, it stated: *'Young people must be in the driving seat to inform decisions, shape provision, and inspect quality.'*

However, it is in the area of active citizenship, political education and understanding of democracy, where youth work has had a major impact on society over the last 20 years. The Crick report highlighted the need for action in awakening the political awareness of younger generations. Since 1945 across all the western democracies there has been a steady decline in the percentage of the population voting in elections. This was particularly apparent in young voters. There was a recognition that unless action was taken democracy would be under threat. The Crick report introduced Citizenship into the National Curriculum and paved the way for active citizenship projects such as the UK Youth Parliament, YouthBank and the involvement of young people in decision-making.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990 set out the need for countries to look at the rights and needs of children and make sure these rights were protected. Article 10 particularly sets out the right for children to be heard. It states 'Children have the right to express an opinion of decisions taken by adults and for the opinion to be taken seriously.' Scandinavian countries have placed significant importance on children being important members of a democratic society. In their book 'Child Perspectives and Children's Perspectives in Theory and Practice', Dommer, Samuelsson, and Hundeide state:

'The UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child gives the child a citizen status. In a democracy this gives an individual certain social, political and civil rights. In this view, the child perspective is an aspect of the strengthened democratic status of the child: an appreciation of the child as an inviolable person whose thoughts and opinions matter and whose interest must be protected.'

The enactment of article 10 and the application of the Crick report is now seen in local authorities and other public bodies such as health, where it is now common to see the involvement of young people in decision making in relation to the commissioning of services, service development and staff recruitment. In each of these

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areas young people are able to bring their expertise of being a young person to these important areas and so bring a unique perspective to each situation, a perspective that as adults it is impossible for us to have as we had a different time to be teenagers in a different world to that of today.

For example, in Norfolk, over 200 young people have become young commissioners; they undertake needs assessments, consult other young people and adults and determine a list of priority areas for development. They then develop service specifications and invite tenders to deliver the service, each bid is then evaluated and a supplier awarded a contract to deliver the service. The contract is then monitored and evaluated and recommendations made for future areas of work.



The impact of all of this work over the last twenty years has been what Professor Crick hoped for. We have seen an increase in participation levels by young voters in each election since 2001. As young people experience greater levels of involvement in decision-making the more they realise and expect their voice to make a difference. The current generation of young voters are becoming more active politically, Many feel let down by older generations in the Brexit vote and that their future is being taken away from them by older people who will not face all the consequences that will impact at some point in the future. In the last election significantly more young people voted (57% compared to 45% in the previous election), and according to YouGov 66% of 18 to 19 year old voters voted Labour with 19% Conservative. This contrasts with 69% of voters aged 70 or over who voted Conservative and 19% Labour. Young people are also becoming more active in campaigns as they recognise that change is needed in political systems that currently appear not to take their needs into account.

So why is this relevant to youth work and what is the place of youth work in a national education system? Youth workers work collaboratively with young people to create opportunities and provide the support to enable young people to develop an understanding of how power works and to exercise power, make mistakes and learn, to have a voice and to see that voice making a real difference. So that when it becomes time to use a democratic mandate the next generation understands the impact and importance of exercising their rights.

Sadly, since 2010 youth services have been savagely cut, with £387 million of funding lost, 3,652 youth Worker posts cut, and 138,898 youth work places for young people lost. So whilst there is a clear need for youth work as part of a National Education System, access to youth work in some areas has been heavily reduced and in a few authorities completely removed.

The profession has long argued for a statutory basis for youth work but successive governments have failed to address this. Many local authorities faced with difficult funding choices have seen youth services as an easy hit, but this approach fails to take into account the additional costs to social care and mental health services through a reduction in the support to young people that a youth service provides.

Access to holistic education including youth work, provided by the state, should be a right for all young people. If as a nation we fail to invest in our children and young people we fail to prepare for all our futures and ultimately society will be weaker as a result. It should not be acceptable to ration access to education services because of funding choices that differ from location to location. Article 29 of the UN Charter of the Rights of the Child set out the rights for education:

‘Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.’

These are rights for all children and young people and youth work plays a critical role in delivering these rights.

Robin Konieczny is Chair of the UNISON Youth and Community Work Forum

Human values and the school curriculum

David Pavett

David Pavett believes that a socialist view of education should be based on a careful critique of existing society and its education. He believes that many of the positions on curriculum set out in *Education Politics* 132 were unargued assertions. Here he describes an alternative theoretical framework.

Human values in what follows should be understood in the broadest possible sense. What makes us different from the rest of the animal world is that we become what we are in the process of active assimilation of the developing culture around us. The key point is that our cultural inheritance is a massive reality which has an objective existence outside of each of us as individuals.

Objectively existing culture takes the form of language, buildings, social mores, books, science, art, paintings, institutions, sport, politics, and much more besides. Becoming human is a long process of assimilating that culture so that it becomes 'second nature' to us – in reality that 'second nature' takes first place with regard to our first nature (our biological nature). What is second becomes first. The process of assimilation of the values of that broad culture is complex and its implications for education are generally not generally appreciated. To be clear, assimilation is an *active process*. This is clear even at the biological level in which the assimilation of food into the body is a highly complex process and not a passive mechanical one. If this is true for biology it is much more the case for the process by which we come to terms with existing culture.

The development of higher mental functions

Our human nature cannot be understood as an outgrowth of our biological nature. It has an entirely different logic of development to that of biology. First and foremost this is because it is based on resources that are *external* to the individual. Therefore it is important for educationalists to understand that even though functions like memory and attention have roots in biology these functions are completely restructured during the development from childhood to adulthood (or should be).

Consider biological memory. Our ability to remember is at the root of all our other abilities (as Steven Rose emphasises in *The 21st Century Brain* 2006). It is at the root of our identity as its tragic loss in some people

in old age so painfully illustrates. Biological memory is relatively limited in scope and extent. Developed human memory differs vastly in both scope, extent, duration and in active recall. This socially developed memory is based on *new functional units* in the brain which result from cultural assimilation. Paradoxically this process of socialisation is at the same time highly individual. The creation of new functional units was illustrated by experiments carried out by Vygotsky co-researcher Alexei Leontiev when he showed that tone deafness could be rectified by setting up quite different brain pathways based on different psycho-motor skills.

Assimilation requires active involvement, creativity and a critical frame of mind

Education is a process in which young people form their individuality through the process of assimilating existing culture. If this process is reduced to mechanical unquestioning performance then its true potential to develop individuality and creativity is destroyed. It must necessarily be a process of developing a critical, questioning approach. Curriculum development should be discussed on that basis and not by assigning 'creativity' to certain parts of it, or even worse, pretending to teach 'creativity' as a 'skill'.

The first conclusion we can draw from this is *the need for teachers to be deeply acquainted with the material they teach*. Being able to fill in a tax return or to handle everyday shopping transactions is not a sufficient basis for teaching primary arithmetic. There are deep questions about the logical priority that should be accorded to arithmetic operations. For example, should inequalities be dealt with prior to teaching the equalities of arithmetic? Then there are a host of issues about how best to teach number-bonding. Should children be encouraged/discouraged from counting on their fingers? Finding the answers to such issues requires a good understanding of mathematics and the psychology of learning mathematics. It must be doubted that generally our primary teachers have reached the required level for this.

Similarly teachers of English literature should have an extensive knowledge of that literature and an ability to discuss it critically. A teacher of a foreign language should know that language well and be able to deal with its problems and idiosyncrasies.

The second conclusion is that the culture to which young people are being introduced is *out there*. It exists

David Pavett (cont)

objectively. Life is impossible without it. But it is a mixture of hard won knowledge and knowhow on the one hand, and pure prejudice and even rank nonsense on the other hand. It contains the result of the hard work of generations in understanding the world and in developing means of self-expression. Trying to assimilate it without critical evaluation can devastate mental development. When genuine knowledge is put on a par with nonsense the former is reduced to the status of the latter.

The third conclusion is therefore the need to develop a questioning and critical attitude to everything that is taught. That clearly puts on the teachers a very heavy responsibility to be able to deal with such questioning in an open, honest and competent manner.

What should be taught?

This is, of course, the heart of curriculum debate and paradoxically I propose nothing by way of detailed schemes. My concern is with the reasoning behind curriculum design and not drawing up specific details of what should be covered. That would exceed by far my ability. In every area of the curriculum a feeling should be developed for the way people have struggled to understand what we now know. The problem with a great deal of education is that knowledge is all too often presented as a given rather than as a work in progress. I suggest this is why, for example, science and maths appear to so many as boring and why what is learned is so quickly forgotten. On leaving school young people should have an overall feel for how ideas, institutions, habits, and assumptions all change radically in the course of history.

Consider the case of mathematics. What should be taught? In line with the argument above I believe that the focus should be on learning maths critically and creatively. This would give great possibilities for developing the curriculum in an integrated way. At present most maths is taught as a series of answers to issues that the pupil/students did not even realise were problems. It is predominantly dogmatic in form ('this is what you have to do to get the answer'). The discovery approach to learning has all too often been based on the idea that children can discover the achievements of humanity by their own lights. They clearly cannot. In the words of the old adage:

If you begin where Adam began you must expect to get no further than Adam.

Learning without real engagement produces shallow and short-term understanding. Learning by finding solutions to novel (to the learner) problems, under guidance, is the basis for deep understanding. But for that there has to be in general a greater purpose to the problems than merely testing what has just been taught. Maths should be used on real world problems of all sorts. We are generally a long way from that and individual teachers do not in general have the time or resources to make up for the inadequacies of standard materials.

Interpreting the world and changing it

The approach outlined above puts me at variance with most of the curriculum arguments in Education Politics No.132. There is such a thing as 'powerful knowledge' and this is not a 'Govian' idea. Theoretical knowledge is our most powerful tool for understanding the world. Similarly it is time to drop the claim that subject divisions are purely a matter of academic convenience. Different parts and levels of reality are actually structured in different ways. The underlying purpose of curriculum design should be that it will play its key part in producing young people with a keen and critical interest in the world around them so that they can and will play a full part in changing that world for the better. They should:

- be fearless in their willingness to question where they do not understand or are unsatisfied with the answers given to them;
- feel confident that in cooperation with others they can deal with problems in a systematic and objective manner;
- value the accumulated wisdom of the past as a basis for their understanding but always be ready to question that wisdom;
- have a deep feel for the constructive nature of human knowledge/behaviour as a historical product and understand how they get restructured in the course of social development.
- Appreciate that all knowledge results from argument, debate and rarely just a plain and simple result.

David Pavett is a member of the SEA Executive

Issues in Labour education policy making

Sim Elliott

This year we went to the polls with a manifesto that was mostly well-received by educational professionals; and its commitments to free higher education, increased funding for schools, opposition to new grammar schools, and provision of free school meals, proved popular with the electorate, as did our commitments to a National Education Service, the restoration of Sure Start and early years funding.

However, there were some serious weaknesses in the manifesto, including:

- no real fleshing-out of what a National Education Service would be in practice, thus avoiding giving a policy position on what we would do with existing academies and free schools, and existing grammar schools, and how we would end the fragmentation of education;
- a continuing tendency to see the early years as primarily an issue of affordable childcare to enable women to work, rather than defining what early education is about for children;
- no mention of the impact of poverty on educational and health outcomes, resulting in no clear commitment seeing tackling child poverty as important to education;
- little consideration of what provision and support is needed for children and young people with special educational needs (beyond committing to increasing training for teachers);
- no mention of youth work, and no policy for higher education beyond the abolition of tuition fees.

If we want to address these omissions I believe we need to address how policy is made the Labour Party. The manifesto process is set out in Clause V of the party's rules. It gives a great deal of power to the leader, (shadow) cabinet, PLP and NEC, so that the manifesto may bear little resemblance to the previous National Policy Forum reports. I believe that we need to consider how Labour Party policy making could be improved and democratised – either by reviewing how the NPF works in relation to all sections of the Party; or perhaps by scrapping the NPF and devising new policy making practice. But first let's consider how policy making has worked recently.

After the Annual Conference in 2016 we didn't start with a blank slate but with the education section of the NPF report voted on in the Conference. Before the vote

there was only a 'debate' on our opposition to grammars, which was more a statement of opposition to Tory plans - something on which all delegates agreed; but none on the tricky stuff - like what should we do to resolve the fragmentation of the education system, or the detail of a National Education Service. Conference rules only give delegates the ability to vote on NPF reports in their entirety – or debate contemporary motions – so it is extremely difficult to have a debate with much meaning. And it would be interesting to ask last year's conference delegates if they had read the section on Education in NPF report, or any of NPF report at all.

But what did the National Policy Forum do after Conference? It met as a full body (for the first time in two years) and drafted three key issues consultation documents for each of the Policy Commissions, including the Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission.

The Policy Commissions are the main arenas for policy development work. They are made up of the shadow cabinet team for the policy area, elected CLP representatives (elected by OMOV biannually), elected CLP representatives (elected at Regional Conferences); representatives from affiliate organisations, trades unions and socialist societies (although the SEA has no automatic right to have a representative on the Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission); members of the NEC; councillors, MPs, Lords and MEPs representatives chosen by the Labour councillors, MPs, MEPs and Lords. The allocation of CLP representatives and representative of affiliate organizations to specific policy commissions is made by the NEC.

Early in 2017 the Education, Early Years and Skills commission issued a consultation document on key issues. From then until April labour party members (individually, or as branch and constituency labour parties), members of the public, affiliated bodies to the Labour Party (trades unions and socialist societies), and any interested group, could consider the key issues consultation documents and make submissions to the National Policy Forum, either through making electronic submissions to the Labour Policy Forum website, or through post/email. As an NPF representative for South East Constituency Labour Parties sitting on the Early Years, Education and Skills Commission, I read all the submissions that were made.

Sim Elliott (cont)

Party members could also contribute by attending regional NPF events; in my region, there was one regional NPF event that considered education, and the attendance at that event represented only a tiny proportion of the size of the South-East membership. Whilst there were some excellent submissions to the policy commission, they came from an extremely small proportion of Party members. NPF representatives made great efforts to publicise the consultation documents and the process of policy making; but from my routine contacts with members, especially those who had joined the Party since the election of Jeremy Corbyn, very few Labour Party members knew there was a process through which they could be involved in policy making let alone that there were consultation documents. The number of collective submissions from branch and constituency parties to the Early Years, Education and Skills commission was very small, both in total number, and in proportion to the total number of submissions, meaning that only a very small number of branches or constituency parties had debated education at all in meetings.

As well as considering submissions, the policy commission heard evidence from organisations, such as education trades unions, and, in previous years, from education academics and researchers. However, the calling of the election curtailed the typical policy commissions timetable, resulting in little collective detailed analysis by the commission members of the submissions made to the Early Years, Education and Skills policy commission either electronically or in person at meetings. The majority of the writing of policy was undertaken by policy officers in collaboration with the shadow cabinet team.

The full NPF did not meet again in person before the election. When it was called there were quickly arranged telephone conferences for each policy commission team, and for each region group of NPF representatives; the outcomes of these discussions fed into the drafting of the manifesto. There was no full NPF meeting to consider a draft of the manifesto, although drafts were discussed, I believe, by the JPC (the Joint Policy Committee) and the NEC, as part of the clause V process.

What was the outcome of this necessarily hasty process? Whilst the Party now has some good bits of education policy, the process of policy making remains very disjointed, and does not currently entail long-term collaborative, holistic consideration of how to

resolve the appalling fragmentation of education that has resulted from the Tory years.

Education is also a fast-moving policy area, and we need to be able to respond to frequent change. For example, in my own area of interest as a specialist teacher in a SEND support service, supporting pre-school children into mainstream reception, the huge reduction in the numbers of teaching assistants will undermine the successful inclusion of many children with SEND (especially the majority who do not have EHCPs) and diminish the wellbeing of many children, young people, parents, carers and teachers. Labour must have the processes to respond quickly to such issues.

There are many logistic and democratic issues about how Party members are involved in policy making, but I think that education is in such a mess in the UK now that we need to consider a much broader and sustained approach to education policy making, that brings together the shadow cabinet, representatives of labour party members, trades unions including the education unions, teachers, parents, carers, children, young people, students, education academics and researchers and groups representing specific issues, subjects or age phases, in a sustained dialogue over time, so that policies, based upon evidence, can really be thrashed out. In government Labour could set-up a Royal Commission on education (perhaps better called a National Commission) to review the current state of education and make coherent proposals; but whilst we are not in power, I believe we need this much broader – and more detailed – approach to developing policy that entails a standing consultative group which engages in a long-term dialogue with the shadow cabinet and the other members of the Early Years, Education and Skills policy commission.

In the meantime, what can individual Labour Party members interested in education do? Firstly, read the education section of the 2017 NPF report, and prepare your submissions for the next cycle of policy development; and organise branch and CLP debates on education so that branches and CLPs can make democratically agreed collective submissions to the policy commission.

Sim Elliott is a National Policy Forum representative for South East CLPs, sitting on the Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission

The Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission

Annual Report

The outcome of the process described on pages 16-17 is the education section of the NPF Report 2017. This report has not been widely advertised and is not found easily on the Party website, but forms the basis of debates at the Annual Conference.

Almost half of it is devoted to a general description of the meetings held and the topics discussed. The second half is reproduced below without further comment.

Manifesto development

Following the announcement of an early General Election, a process of accelerated manifesto development took place. The Commission's role in this was to expedite the work from 2015 and 2016 in order to identify priorities from this work that should inform the education sections of Labour's manifesto. Representatives looked at manifesto priorities submitted by members, supporters and stakeholder groups. This was done through a series of telephone conferences which took place before the Clause V meeting which agreed the manifesto. The Commission considered all policy areas within their remit and there were varied contributions and priorities identified; many of these went on to be reflected in the final document.

Schools

With regard to schools policy there was a firm view that Labour's policy should be about raising standards in all schools, regardless of type. The Commission were keen that Labour should keep its commitment that all teachers should have qualified teacher status. Teaching assistants and other school support staff should also receive better support within schools. Representatives said that they would like to see Labour commit to a review of school assessment and the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) and were pleased that the manifesto committed the Party to looking at primary school assessment.

Universal Free School Meals

The Commission wishes to pay tribute to our colleague and former Co-convenor, Mary Turner. Mary was a passionate advocate for universal free school meals and always ensured this issue remained firmly on the agenda. People will remember her for her tireless campaigning on this issue and Labour's manifesto commitment to introduce universal free school meals for primary school children at this year's election was in no small part due to her hard work.

Teachers

The Commission has noted throughout its activity that teacher recruitment and retention is a worrying issue. Teacher workload and public sector pay restraint was

identified by experts that spoke to the Commission as reasons why this has become a growing problem. This was reflected in the manifesto, with Labour committing to lifting the public sector pay cap. Commission members want to see greater focus on trusting teachers and valuing the teaching profession and were glad that the manifesto included measures to include teachers in curriculum development.

Early years and childcare

Commission members were clear that they wanted to see a better childcare offer than the one currently offered by the Government, with a move towards a universal childcare system in the future. Members also identified better support for families including grandparents and paternity rights as a priority. There was broad agreement that Labour should commit to protecting Sure Start and that adequate support for all families was encouraged. Representatives also highlighted that the quality of the workforce in the early years sector should be raised in order to improve social mobility. This was a key finding of the 2015/16 Children and Education Commission's Priority document. Transitioning to a graduate-led early years workforce became a key feature of Labour's early years offer at the election.

Further education and apprenticeships

There were detailed discussions concerning further education and apprenticeships where members were keen that Labour should put further education on an equal footing with higher education. The Commission wants to see more support for people accessing apprenticeships in terms of living costs, particularly people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). On the issue of apprenticeships, the Commission's discussions to date had arrived at the conclusion that any apprenticeship schemes put forward should be done in conjunction with and inform the Industrial Strategy. In the development of apprenticeships, members indicated that they would like to see more training on the job with a focus on quality not quantity. Further education was a key theme of the education section of the manifesto, with many of the issues raised by the Commission appearing as commitments.

Adult skills

There was a strong feeling amongst Commission members that Labour should commit to revitalising lifelong learning which has been much neglected as a policy area. Members were keen to see adult skills become a key feature of the National Education Service, making sure that training was meeting local needs.

The Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission Annual Report (cont.)

The report can be found at <http://www.leftfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/>

Greater focus and investment in lifelong learning was a key feature of the manifesto with the Commission's work having informed policy development.

University tuition fees

The debate surrounding the cost of accessing higher education appeared in many of the submissions the Commission received during this year's work programme and Representatives were very keen that access should be improved for young people to go on to higher education. The Labour Party manifesto outlined Labour's plan to abolish university tuition fees in line with many other northern European countries in order that no-one is priced out of accessing higher education.

Children's social care and children with SEND

Within children's social care, the Commission are concerned that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are not receiving adequate support. Members want to see fairer admissions and better support for these children. The Labour manifesto committed to delivering a strategy for children with SEND which would include embedding SEND more substantially into teacher training.

Current issues

School budgets

School funding continues to be a grave and growing problem for schools in England. Extra funding committed by the Conservatives will not stop the cuts to budgets which the Institute of Fiscal Studies have said will mean a 4.6 per cent cut between 2015 and 2018. Schools have been clear that cuts to budgets will cost teachers, school support staff and mean larger class sizes and a smaller curriculum offer. School funding formed a key part of discussions of the Commission this year, and was frequently highlighted in many of the verbal and written submissions. Labour has been clear that no schools should lose funding so no child's education is harmed. Labour's 2017 manifesto committed the Party to properly funding the schools system in order that no teachers are lost and that all children are given access to the resources they need to access an excellent education.

National Funding Formula

In addition to funding for schools being cut, many schools have also been facing the prospect of further funding changes through the Conservatives' proposals to amend the National Funding Formula. Labour supports the principle of a new formula – the current one is based on outdated measurements and we need to ensure schools are funded according to their needs –

but the proposals the Government has come forward with to date would see most schools losing funding. The Commission had many conversations on this issue throughout the year, recognising that many areas around the country had historically been underfunded but that many more schools would lose out based on the proposed new settlement.

Grammar schools

The Conservative Government's White Paper on schools, published in September 2016 outlined plans to reintroduce grammar schools into the schools system. The grammar school debate featured heavily in the discussions of the Commission this year and many submissions also considered this policy. There was agreement that the Labour Party should oppose this policy as there is no evidence that a selective school system aids social mobility and it is contrary to Labour's commitment that all children should be given a fair chance. Following the General Election, the Conservative Government paused its plans to bring back grammar schools.

Teacher recruitment and retention

Teacher recruitment and retention remains a growing problem in England. The most recent data confirmed the current rate of qualified teachers joining the profession is at its lowest for five years with the number of unqualified teachers growing. The Education Select Committee's inquiry into the issue which concluded earlier this year found that the issue is deepening with the current Government lacking a long-term plan to tackle the issue. Many submissions discussed teacher workload as a continuing problem, with Ofsted and the assessment system being raised as having an effect. The Commission discussed these issues and heard from the NAHT who also touched on these issues. Representatives agree that this is a key problem that the Labour Party should continue to examine.

Adult skills and Brexit

Brexit will weigh heavily on skills policy in England and it featured in many discussions of the Commission this year. Although it is not clear what will happen once the UK leaves the European Union, it is expected that levels of skilled migration will be hit which will place greater importance on the UK workforce and its ability to reskill and adapt. As Brexit negotiations continue the Commission will keep a close eye on the implications these could have on changes to workers' rights and the effect immigration will have on skills and the workforce in England.

Forthcoming events

SEA Meetings for 2017-18

Finance and General Purposes at 11.00; Executive at 12.15;
Members' meeting open to all SEA members 2.00 pm

Sat 16th September	Leeds
Sat 18th November	London
Sat 13th January	Birmingham
Sat 10th March	Manchester
Sat 12th May	Cardiff

Caroline Benn Memorial Lecture

Tue 7th November House of Commons, London at 6.00 pm.

This year's lecture will be delivered by Rebecca Allen, Director of Education Datalab. You can read more about Rebecca and her work at: <https://educationdatalab.org.uk/author/beckyallen/> and at <https://rebeccaallen.co.uk>

Reclaiming Education Annual Conference

This year's conference will be on Sat 11th November at the NUT building in London. The theme of the conference will be "A National Education Service – what should it mean?"

SEA Annual Conference

This will be held on Saturday 23rd June in London. It will be followed on Sun 24th by the first meeting of the 2018-19 SEA Executive.

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