Education Politics

Journal of the Socialist Educational Association

March 2018, N° 135 Free to members

£1 non-members

Where Next For Education?
Funding, Pay, Accountability

Affiliated to the Labour Party www.socialisteducationalassociation.org

Editorial

It's been quite a term hasn't it?

Justine Greening has gone - replaced by Damian Hinds, a committed Grammar School supporter. One of his first steps as Education Secretary has been to commit to address teacher workload, Given that Nicky Morgan made similar overtures and workload increased under her wtach, it remains to be seen if any meaningful action will be taken. On the 10th of March the DfE published a series of documents concerning teacher workload and why former teachers have chosen to leave the profession. The findings make for challenging reading, though are perhaps not surprising. The key factors that played a role in teachers choosing to leave include:

- Government policy
- Excessive workload
- Poor leadership
- Inflexible teaching policies
- Poor pay
- Stress and ill health

These must be addressed urgently if we are to deliver high quality education to all children and young people.

We've also had the Toby Young saga, resulting in not just his departure from the Office for Students, but also from the New Schools Network. Policy Exchange have also insisted that bringing in state issued textbooks will solve the workload crisis. The Government is attempting to undertake a review of Higher Education funding, and of Exclusions.

At the time of writing, the teaching union conferences are about to take place. Funding, workload and mental health are all major themes at the NASUWT conference and NEU section conferences (this year the ATL and NUT sections meet for the last time ahead of the first united NEU conference next spring) - all contain strong motions on these issues.

The School Cuts campaign coalition continues to draw attention to the consequences of underfunding our education system, which may be why Damian Hinds has now admitted that funding is "tight". Although the DfE have committed an additional £1.3 billion to address funding concerns, it appears that the DfE have not yet been able to find the entire sum from the departmental budget. In order to meet the needs of pupils with SEND many local authorities have asked the DfE for permission to move additional funds into the High Needs Block from the Schools Block, the DfE has turned many of these requests down, which will have worrying implications for vulnerable learners and the education professionals working hard to support them.

We await the outcome of some significant Government consultations - the Mental Health Green Paper, the future of Qualified Teacher Status consultation, and the future of Relationships and Sex Education and PSHE teaching call for evidence, to name a few. We also await the STRB outcome - which may lift the public sector pay cap for teachers. Head teachers and governors will be left in an impossible position if they are expected to cover the cost of pay rises without significant additional funding, so any increase in pay must be covered by new money from the treasury.

UCU have also undertaken an extensive programme of industrial action in response to savage attacks on the USS pension scheme. The action has successfully forced Universities UK back to the table, and may yet win a substantial victory for members.

I chose the image for the front cover because frankly education is in a state of crisis. Not enough people are applying to train as teachers, our children are struggling to access essential mental health provision, our teachers are burning out with unmanageable workload and inadequate funding is putting the viability of education establishments at risk.

A National Education Service has never been more needed.

Anne

Fixing our fragmented schools system: Labour MPs launch inquiry into schools oversight system

Schools have been hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons recently, with the likes of Wakefield City Academy Trust (WCAT), the Education Fellowship Trust and the Collective Spirit multi academy trust in Greater Manchester highlighting big problems of oversight and accountability bringing our education system into disrepute.

We have seen a catalogue of errors at some schools leading to terrible results and poor performance, and an increased use of related-party transactions, where trusts give contracts to people they know, raising concerns about financial probity and financial management. An important new report by the National Audit Office adds further questions about capacity in the system.

MPs are demanding change. The Government's approach to school structures has left weak oversight in a fragmented, divisive schools landscape, so that serious problems in schools are going unnoticed and unchallenged for far too long, there is a serious lack of localism, taking account of community need and voice, which is affecting basic responsibilities such as delivering enough good school places, and there is limited capacity in school leadership, which we know is crucial for school improvement.

In Wakefield, the WCAT case has seen a multi academy trust accused of "asset stripping" schools, with the Trust transferring millions of pounds into their account before collapsing. At Collective Spirit, the Manchester Evening News has revealed how there was one phone, no computer network, and how the Trust was £1 million in debt before it was closed down.

These cases raise serious concerns about where the buck should stop and who is accountable for systemic failure. There is little or no support, challenge or on-going monitoring in place by the Department for Education even though this should be a given, particularly for risky undertakings such as new models of schools, being run by people with little or no experience of running schools. The cases we have seen recently point to a failure of leadership at all levels with Ofsted, Regional Schools Commissioners, and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, all too blasé about intervention. Ministers particularly have a tin ear, claiming everything is working well despite serious evidence to the contrary.

Whilst we are rightly proud of Labour's academy programme which delivered transformational change in a small number of poor preforming schools, the unchecked explosion in the growth of academies and academy chains under the Conservatives has seen increasing problems.

That's why, as Chair of the Backbench Parliamentary Labour Party Education Committee, I have launched an inquiry into school improvement, accountability and oversight. Labour's guiding principle for our school system should be that every pupil, whatever school they attend, wherever they live and whatever their background, should have an entitlement to a world-class education.

As part of Labour's National Education Service, at the 2017 General Election our manifesto committed to ensuring democratic accountability to all schools, including appropriate controls to see that schools serve the public interest and their local communities. This PLP Inquiry will give us a chance to discuss the principles of what our school oversight and accountability policy should be and how we can flesh out our plans ahead of the next General Election. It will also provide stakeholders outside the PLP the chance to input on this work, drawing together evidence and experience from Party members, from the education sector and beyond to help develop a policy fit for the future.

Key themes that we will explore will include how schools can be better-accountable to parents and local communities; how we can level-up the schools system to better foster partnership working; the sharing of excellent practice and improve support for poor-performing schools; and how can we ensure enough good school places in high performing schools in every community.

The Tories have their heads in the sand on this issue, blithely ignoring failure across the country which is damaging confidence in our schools system, and leaving too many children in failing schools with poor prospects. Labour is on the side of pupils, parents and teachers, with our starting point that no child should be left behind and no school left to struggle and fail alone. We'll fix the fragmentation in our education system and make sure it works for the many not the few.

Lucy Powell MP is the Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Manchester Central and Chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party Backbench Education Committee.

National Policy Forum Report

Labour's National Policy Forum met in Leeds over the weekend of 17-18th February. Very much at the last minute and after some pressure, it was recognised that SEA was entitled to send an observer to the Forum. For that privilege we were charged £200 and had to pay all our own expenses. That is however an argument for another day.

Sadly, the meeting was noticed in the outside world only for the furious row that erupted over the election of a new Chair of the Forum. It was deeply depressing that more passion was aroused over this issue than over any of the policy issues that were debated. This took up the whole first hour of the meeting and caused the Leader's speech to be put back to the lunch hour. Eventually however, Jeremy got to deliver a rousing speech in which he hinted pretty broadly at the shift in position over Brexit that was announced a week or two later.

The timing of the Forum was also a bit curious in that there were no actual policy proposals to debate. Instead there were a set of consultation papers – one from each of the Policy Commissions plus one on Brexit. Each paper set out some background information and then posed a series of questions which we understood would be the basis of consultations with the membership and affiliates as a whole.

Most of the documents didn't set out to cover the whole of the policy area. So for example the Housing, Local Government and Transport paper only dealt with devolution, the Health document with health inequalities and the International paper with sustainable development goals. In this respect though, education was something of an exception in that it addressed the concept of the National Education Service and how the original 10 point charter could be developed further – so it covered most of the challenges facing the education system. The other exception was a very comprehensive paper on Brexit which set out the costs and the challenges in detail and very clearly.

Brexit and Health were dealt with by the whole Forum in plenary sessions. In both cases there were high quality presentations from the front bench teams and a real attempt to focus debate around some specific questions. Other topics were dealt with in smaller workshop sessions. These were not meetings of the different policy commissions – anyone could go to any subject they liked.

I went to two workshop sessions on education and one on devolution. Despite the fact that the documents provided posed some very specific questions, the actual sessions paid very little attention to them. I had imagined that these sessions would be an opportunity to refine the consultation before it went out to the whole party and perhaps to begin to answer some of the questions. In fact however the discussion ranged very widely with many delegates just talking about issues that they had a personal interest or background in.

In the education sessions, much of the debate was around early years and lifelong learning which are certainly areas where the NES will need to focus given that both are currently under-resourced and are organised (disorganised?) in ways that make access very difficult for many. But it did mean that relatively limited attention was given to schools. There were some rather tantalising hints from Angela Rayner on local democratic accountability and on the case for a fully comprehensive school system but it seems that we are still some way from reaching a fully formed position on these issues.

The next stage in the process of policy formation will be for the various consultation documents to be finalised and issued for debate and comment across the party. Exactly when is unclear and with local elections taking up most of the time from now until early May, there isn't much time before the summer. Presumably some specific proposals will emerge and will go to Conference but there isn't due to be another meeting of the Forum at which they can be agreed. So what democratic validity they'll have is debatable. In past years, the full Policy Forum has met in the summer and signed off the proposals that were going to Conference. It's not clear why this model has been changed this year.

My overall impression from this weekend is that it was good to be engaged in such a broadly based event – it was notable that there was a strong trade union commitment to it so it genuinely felt like a body representing all elements of the party. But I fear it will have been of limited value in moving policy forward. The Democracy Review which is now underway has a serious job to do both to make the Forum's debates more meaningful and also to radically improve the links between Forum members and the wider membership. Meanwhile, as far as SEA is concerned it will be really important to engage fully with whatever emerges and to seek to mobilise support behind a truly radical education manifesto.

John Bolt

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

- a submission from Co-ops and Mutuals Wales

In recent years, we have experienced the collapse of communism and the serious dysfunctional operation of capitalism. In offering a vision and a narrative about transforming society, Co-operative values and principles remain a shining beacon for achieving the democratic transformation of society, but this will require a 'bottom-up' approach.

It is proposed that a strong case exists for creating an 'Education Commission' taking account of differences across the four UK countries. As Nelson Mandela says, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." (23 Apr 2013)

We absolutely agree with the observations of Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the General Secretary of the Co-operative Women's Guild (1861-1944) that 'Co-operation is far more than a reformist movement. We are working for no patchwork modification. We are seeking to lay the foundations of a new society".

The Co-operative model has always been about the grassroots empowerment of members. As Bonner reminds us "… for the most important product of the Co-operative Movement are co-operators and if it fails to produce these it may well end with producing nothing – for it cannot exist without them." (Arnold Bonner, British Co-operation, 1966)

Most will be aware of the significant ABCA system of Army education in World War II which led to a Labour Government in 1945. Since its inception, the Co-operative Women's Guild had a practical system of education by doing, which is discussed elsewhere. How could an 'Education Commission' assist us with fresh ideas in facing such a daunting task and one fit for the 21st Century?

The fact that we are realists does not prevent us from being idealists also. In building upon recent work on Co-operative Education, we find the work of philosopher Martha Nassbaum impressive especially her work on 'creating capabilities'.

Whilst this is not an easy read for most, including the writer, Otto and Zeigler in 'Education and Capabilities makes this more accessible, in particular, when referring to 'What is the Point of Equality' (1999) by Elizabeth Anderson.

In the context of "the basic preconditions for the process of generating informed and considered decisions that matter to plan and shape one's life", Otto and Zeigler state:

"Anderson argues that to "be capable of functioning as an equal citizen involves not just the ability to exercise specifically political rights but also to participate in the various activities of civil society, including participation in the economy. And functioning in these ways presupposes functioning as a human being".

"Thus there are three basic "aspects of individual functioning: as a human being; as a participant in a system of co-operative production; and as a citizen of a democratic state".

"These three aspects fit well to the suggestions about democracy and education ….(and the) space to evaluate the 'capability inputs' of educational institutions."

" A further aspect of the democratic 'capability inputs' in the field of education is the creation of space for the 'capability of voice' to become effective. This implies the creation of spaces where individuals get the opportunity to express their own opinions… It is also a basic precondition for…. .. individuals and groups to be able to identify valuable capabilities and to participate in informed discussions …. on this matter".

To paraphrase Anderson: "Education is a basic capability …. in the sense of being a fundamental capability and foundational to other capabilities extends to … reflection, understanding information and awareness of one's capabilities… and the possibility to formulate exactly the valued beings and doings that the individual has reasons to value… and certain levels of social and political participation."

Thus we are referring to learning by doing. Not, a deficit model of education, but one that builds upon the capabilities of people. Things that people enjoy, wish to do, value, and also create that pearl of self-learning which may not be measurable in conventional terms. A WEA type model if you will.

We therefore propose that:-

(a) Any future proposals for co-operative expansion in any sector of the economy be proofed against the very simple question – where will the co-operators of the future come from to ensure an authentic democratic movement based upon Co-operative Values and Principles;

(b) Serious consideration be given to establishing an 'Education Commission' focused upon developing capability, primarily through our state education system to support a 'bottom-up' approach to reinvigorating the UK Co-operative Movement.

Why we need statutory RSE

Legislation making relationships and sex education (RSE) statutory in all schools is safely enacted in the Children and Social Work Act 2017, but the details are yet to be spelt out in updated Government guidance and regulations. While these documents are being drafted, ready for another public consultation, it's worth considering why we needed statutory RSE in the first place.

The Sex Education Forum was created 30 years ago as a group which brought together different organisations with a shared belief that children and young people are entitled to reliable information about growing up, relationships and sex. The founding group included the sexual health charity Brook and the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, amongst others, and showed from an early stage how faith and health perspectives could work together to identify common ground. Around this time a Danish book, 'Jenny lives with Eric and Martin' had caused a furore when it was discovered in a library in a school in London.

The campaign for sex education, and later RSE, to be properly included in the curriculum continued for three decades. Sex education is not, of course, a new thing, but the marginal status the subject held during this time had a range of negative consequences: a lack of curriculum time, few specially trained educators, a scarcity of resources, and a general lack of quality. For children and young people the experience of sex education has too often been 'too little, too late and too biological'.

The new legislation makes Relationships Education compulsory in all primary schools for the first time. Parents will not have the right to withdraw their children from this, but will retain their existing right to withdraw their children from aspects of sex education taught outside of National Curriculum Science. A central motivation in making Relationships Education compulsory was to ensure that every child would learn information that enables them to recognise behaviour that it abusive and know how to get help. Our data from a survey of over 2000 young people published in 2016 (Heads or Tails, SEF) showed that many children are leaving primary school without basic information to keep them safe:

- only 40% of respondents had learnt about the difference between safe and unwanted touching
- only34% had learnt how to get help if they experienced unwanted touching or sexual abuse', 50% had not
- 1 in 10 young people who left primary school between 2012 and 2015 had not learnt the correct terms for genitalia.

This survey data tallies with our experience when we are training school staff. There is usually at least one school represented where correct terms for genitalia are not used or in fact no words are used at all, making it impossible to communicate a clear message to children about which parts of the body are private and should not be touched by others. The overriding concern of staff is that they will not be supported if someone challenges them about what they are teaching. So the updated Government guidance is a really important space to get these details straight and to tell schools that they will be supported and that they are expected to teach medically correct information about our bodies and to cover legal facts and rights.

Since RSE will be part of the basic school curriculum, not a National Curriculum subject, it is unlikely that the government will produce particularly detailed guidance about what should be taught and when, but they could lend their support to a spiral and developmental curriculum. To help schools we have produced a curriculum design tool which sets out questions to explore with children and young people at each age and stage. This creates opportunities to revisit core areas such as 'my body' and 'feelings and emotions' at each Key Stage, if not every year. Another starting point for designing a curriculum is to ask 'what outcomes do we want for children by the time they leave primary and secondary school?' The Sex Education Forum responded to the recent 'call for evidence' guided by this question:

By the end of primary school we want pupils to be:

- Prepared for the physical and emotional changes of puberty
- Able to recognise gender stereotypes and that everyone is unique and equal
- To know that bodies vary and some parts are private

- To understand the difference between safe and unsafe touching
- To have the confidence and vocabulary to report abuse including knowing the correct terms for genitalia
- Able to recognise types of bullying and how to challenge it
- To appreciate that families vary but care-giving is central

By the end of the secondary school pupils should be:

- Confident in their ability to make and maintain positive relationships
- Able to identify and articulate emotions
- Feel in control of their sexual behaviour and decisions
- Able to actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent
- Critically aware of how sexually explicit media present an unreal picture of sexual behaviour
- Able to recognise how gender stereotypes can normalise violent or non-consensual behaviour
- Able to take responsibility for their own physical, and emotional sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing
- Know how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment

If it is implemented wisely statutory RSE can be a means of ensuring that all schools provide a comprehensive an inclusive programme. At secondary school level it is very important that this is understood to include sexual and reproductive health information including about contraception and abortion, based on medically correct facts. From the outset children need to learn about families and relationships in a way that is inclusive of diversity. The fact is that every family and relationship is different, but the core values of love, care and respect for one another are largely shared.

Statutory status for RSE is the most effective vehicle to guarantee children and young people's entitlement to information that will keep them safe and healthy, but it is more than that. It is a once in a life time opportunity to create a thriving community of creative and motivated educators who see teaching RSE as a choice and a career pathway. This is more likely to materialise if personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is handed statutory status too, which is an option that was laid down in the Children and Social Act 2017. RSE should rightly be seen as identifiable part of the broader subject of PSHE education. In future we might then see job adverts for PSHE teachers, and thus a virtuous circle of supply and demand.

The Sex Education Forum carried out surveys with young people in 2008, 2011, 2013 and 2015. In each case we included a standard question asking young people to rate the quality of their school RSE overall. We have found a trend, with fewer young people rating their RSE as 'bad' or 'very bad' and more young people rating their RSE as 'good' or 'very good'. This is promising.

But the rate of improvement has been too slow; since 2008 the number of young people describing their RSE as 'bad' or 'very bad' has only reduced by approximately 3%. Without some substantial change it might take until the year 2029 to get another 3% improvement. Statutory RSE can be that change, but successful implementation is key. The government guidance must be based on evidence and establish clear principles such as the 12 points in our statement of commitment, which is widely supported. Investment in training must also be part of the strategy, otherwise RSE will stay in the slow lane.

To make your commitment to high quality RSE visible download our poster and share it with colleagues or use it as a springboard to help your school prepare for statutory and high quality RSE.

Lucy Emmerson, Director, Sex Education Forum

Wellbeing Taken Seriously in Wales

A few years ago, Caerphilly Labour Party was successful in having its motion on the importance of integrating the services of education, health and social services when dealing with wellbeing issues for very young children in deprived areas of Wales. This motion was backed by SEA Cymru and we were pleased that it was adopted by Welsh Labour Conference in 2015.

Since then, there have been some interesting welfare developments adopted by the Welsh Government and promoted by Welsh Labour MPs in Parliament. For example, last December the Cardiff West MP Kevin Brennan, a friend of the SEA while in office as the opposition spokesman for education, raised the following question in the House of Commons: "I can announce to the House that over 100 libraries closed this year. Libraries are genuine engines of social mobility. Why are the Government content with that situation, because the Minister seems to be? Does he agree with the editor of Public Library News, who recently stated: The example of other countries shows that the decline of the library in this country is not a natural thing: this is a man-made disaster, brought on by short-sighted but long -term cuts?" Needless to add that an unsatisfactory answer was given by the Tories who appear not to care whether our children, young people and the general public have somewhere dry, warm and quiet to read and learn!

Back in 2011, 11-year-old Dylan Seabridge, died from scurvy at his family's isolated Pembrokeshire farmhouse. From the age of 13 months this poor boy was educated at home with no direct contact with doctors, nurses, social workers or teachers. As a result of this shocking case, Gladys Rhodes, author of an independent review report, called on the Welsh Government to introduce a compulsory register of home-taught children. She felt that the Welsh Government's current legislation on Child Welfare was not totally in keeping with the U.N.'s Convention of the Rights of the Child. Professor Sally Holland Wales' Children's Commissioner also called for a compulsory register. A register would help to ensure that home-educated children don't slip through the net. The Commissioner reported that 46 out of 10,000 pupils of compulsory school age in Wales i.e. 2,000 children, now learn at home. The Education Secretary Kirsty Williams stated, [in the 'Western Mail' 4/1/18] that she accepted their recommendations to ensure that, 'all children in Wales receive a suitable education, are safeguarded and have the opportunity to benefit from universal services. In addition, the Minister is now ensuring that local authorities are collaborating in drawing up national safeguarding practice guidelines for electively home-educated children. I cannot help feeling that such children are missing out so much by not attending school. Yet at the same time with the current obsession with testing and setting targets and publishing league tables, I am not surprised that so many children and their parents are opting out of the state educational system. However, home schooling is not the answer.

Another issue often over looked by the public is the question of child burial fees, raised by Caroline Harris MP for Swansea East. For any parent to witness the death of their child, is painful enough but to then be in financial difficulty over funeral arrangements, is doubly troublesome. Caroline passionately campaigned for the waiving of these fees both here in Wales and in parliament. The Welsh Government has accepted responsibility for the cost of such funeral expenses, a thoughtful act by a Labour government.

The Welsh Government has very recently launched a 12-week public consultation on the issue of banning the smacking of children. The Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies, is keen to safeguard children's rights by protecting them from physical punishment. "Legislation was introduced many years ago to stop physical punishment in schools and childcare settings-now is the time to ensure it is no longer acceptable anywhere", a quote from the minister in the Western Mail 9/1/18. Two SEA Cymru members, Christine Chapman former AM [Welsh Assembly Member] and Julie Morgan AM, currently standing for election for the post of Deputy Leader of Welsh Labour, both have campaigned on

this issue and deserve credit for their commitment to this course. Now the Welsh Government plan to remove the defence of reasonable punishment to the offence of assault and battery and support measures that give children a better start in life.

Other measures to help give children a better start in life is the Welsh Governments commitment to investing £25million in 2018/19 and £45million in 2019/20 into supporting best childcare for working parents. This is part of an election manifesto promise to provide 30 hours a week of free education and childcare to 3 and 4 year olds for 48 weeks in a year. The Welsh Government has unveiled a new 10year plan to grow and develop a highly skilled childcare workforce to support this scheme, as the wish to attract the right people with the appropriate skills and qualifications. What is particularly interesting is the government's commitment to develop a recruitment - framework to promote a career in childcare and play. Their idea of raising standards and skills is to offer a structured training and development route for child-minders and home carers and working with Welsh Universities to embed competency into Early Years and Childhood Degrees. We are thankfully not talking about the Tories 'Big Society', staff on the cheap i.e. unpaid, unqualified volunteers approach to early years provision. We recognise that early years provision needs to be delivered by qualified staff.

I do not have the space to go into other initiatives that the Welsh Government have recently taken, such as increased funding for the expansion of Welsh language education, the ending of youth homelessness, high quality all-age apprenticeships schemes and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Wales Act. However, while life here in Wales can be very challenging for many, young and old, what I hope I have been able to do is high-light that a Labour Government, even one that is on the receiving end of savage cuts from the Tories in Westminster, can show the way to a better, more caring society.

Chris Newman SEA Cymru

SEA Executive Elections 2018

Nominations are now open for elections to the officer posts and to the SEA Executive for 2018-19. We need to fill the following roles:

Chair, Vice Chair, General Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Deputy General Secretary, Minutes Secretary, Digital Campaigns Officer, Publications Officer, Women's Officer, Youth Officer, Equalities Officer

In addition to the officers, there are 8 places for men and 8 for women on the Executive. As branches with over 35 members, Greater Manchester, Haringey and Wales are entitled to appoint a branch delegate to the NEC

The Executive meets 6 times a year in different cities across the country usually on a Saturday - though the first meeting of the new executive is on Sunday 24th June which is the day after our Annual Conference.

The deadline for nominations is 30th April 2018. Self nominations are welcome. Please sent all nominations to **secretary@socialisteducationalassociation.org**.

SEA Branches

It is really exciting to be able to report that we are beginning to see a number of new SEA branches emerging in different parts of the country. It's been a long time since we've had an active branch network, but with the rapid increase in membership this is becoming possible. It means that we have a growing capacity to get SEA involved in local campaigning and can give education a higher profile in the part as a whole.

At present there are branches in:

Croydon, Greater Manchester, Haringey, Liverpool, Nottingham, South East London (Lambeth and Southwark), South Shields, South West London (Merton, Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth, Wales, Waltham Forest

If any members in these areas have not heard from their local branch, please contact me and I'll put you in touch with them.
Our rules for branches say there needs to be at least 10 individual members in an area to form a branch. The area can be any reasonable area – usually one or more constituencies or one or more local authorities. There are a number of other areas where there are enough members to form a branch – again please get in touch if you want to know what the situation is in your area.

John Bolt
secretary@socialisteducationalassociation.org

Support Staff

Forgotten By Government

School support staff have been forgotten by government - ministers only talk about teachers or school leaders. This is astonishing bearing in mind that support staff are 50% of the workforce. Nonetheless this invaluable group of workers struggle on in the face of low pay, job cuts and outsourcing.

In particular low pay has been a constant complaint by school staff, as wages have been held down by austerity and real term funding cuts.

Historically school support staff have been paid on local government pay scales, negotiated by the National Joint Council for England, Northern Ireland and Wales; with Scotland covered by a similar body, the SJC. Local government has seen massive cuts in funding and council staff overall have become the worst paid in the public sector, with school support staff at the lower end of the pay scales.

Recent pay awards have been complicated by the introduction of academies, which have the freedom to move away from national pay scales. In practice few have done so, most have been happy to implement the low NJC awards of recent years.

However, last year after years of pay austerity the Local Government Association, who negotiate on behalf of the employers, finally began to heed pleas from the unions that inadequate pay was damaging services. Recruitment and retention had started to become a bigger issue as private sector wages began to zoom ahead of the public sector.

After several months of negotiations the employers finally offered a two year deal worth 16% for those on the lowest NJC scale point; with increases of between 15% and 4.3% for those on the lower scales and 4.04% over two years for those currently earning around £19,500 or above.
Our NJC committee initially recommended rejection of the award and campaigned for members to take action to improve the offer. They pointed out that a chunk of the 16% would have to be paid anyway as the NJC scales would be affected by the government's national minimum wage. The committee also had concerns that the 2% each year for those on modest incomes was likely to be undermined by higher inflation. In mid March the NJC Committee received the results of the consultation, which showed a very narrow rejection and a mixed branch and regional picture. So after a long discussion the committee reluctantly amended its recommendation to accept and is now doing a further consultation with UNISON branches.

If accepted there will be a notable impact on schools. The effect of significant increases for the lower end will see a noticeable increase for members but also the pay bill.

The potential impact has caused some academies to suggest they might pull out of the NJC. Funnily, whilst some academies seem quite happy to pay their senior leaders hundreds of thousands of pounds (which could fund a fair few low paid support staff), they baulk at paying low paid workers a decent wage. We will point out to academies the complications, their legal obligations and the equal pay dangers if they try to move away from NJC and devise their own pay systems. If necessary we will take appropriate legal or industrial action.

In addition to low pay, school staff have also been at the forefront of job cuts. Support staff posts in Scotland have been cut by 20% since 2010 and England has seen an 8% reduction in Teaching Assistants in Secondaries since 2013; a 10% reduction in Technicians over a similar period and similar cuts to other staff.

Job cuts alongside increased pupil numbers have created a significant increase in workload for all school staff. Campaigning with our sister unions we have highlighted the severe impact that restricted funding is having in schools (see the website www.schoolcuts.org.uk). It was widely acknowledged that this joint campaign along with pressure from parents and the general public led to the government pumping an additional £1.3billion into schools funding.

However we know that the government is likely to fund a significant pay offer for NHS workers and it would be outrageous that they are not prepared to put the money into local government or other parts of the public sector, to do similar.

School support staff have faced a double whammy of stagnant wages and increased workload. It is right that they receive a significant pay increase and it is right that central government should find the money to pay for it.

Jon Richards—Head of Education and Children's Services, Unison

Higher Education Funding Review

Conservative manifestos have form when it comes to HE policy. A 'one-liner' in the 2015 manifesto was subsequently used to justify the requirement that English Universities engage in a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Developed in double-quick time by the Department for Education under the direction of former Universities Minister Jo Johnson, the TEF is a political and bureaucratic construct designed to underpin an ideology that higher education is a market in which students need yet more information to exercise their consumer rights.
Alongside the TEF, the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) received Royal Assent in the dying days of the 2015-17 Parliament. This provides the legislative framework for the Office for Students (OfS), a regulator which replaces the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce) at the end of March 2018. Established with cross-party support by the 1992 FE and HE Act, Hefce was a buffer body created to avoid direct Ministerial interference in the sector.
The same cannot be said of the OfS, the politicisation of which was highlighted in a report from the Office of Public Appointments into the circumstances in which 'journalist' and Conservative supporter Toby Young was appointed to the OfS's Board. Young was encouraged to apply by Johnson himself. At the same time, NUS representatives were rejected, apparently because they had expressed views critical of government policy.

A tertiary funding review is another 'one-liner' - this time in the 2017 Tory manifesto written largely by Nick Timothy. The latter had been one of Theresa May's special advisers at the Home Office until he left at the insistence of David Cameron. Timothy was soon appointed as Director of the New Schools Network (the main source of funding for which comes from the DfE) but was reappointed as May's special adviser when she became Prime Minister in 2016. He was replaced at the NSW by none other than Toby Young who remains its Director - a political merry-go-round in itself.

Following the 2017 election, senior Tory MPs demanded that Timothy leave Number 10. Within weeks Timothy secured a column at the Telegraph where he continues to expound his (and possibly the Prime Minister's views) about a range of issues including education. Timothy is, for example, a supporter of grammar schools. In August 2017 he turned his attention to universities and in a highly contentious piece implied that some universities were effectively not worth a candle. This so infuriated former Tory Minister (now Lord) David Willetts that the latter wrote a response countering Timothy's tirade. It is no accident that Timothy also publicly criticised former Education Secretary, Justine Greening, accusing her of holding-up a tuition fee review.
This then is the background to the tertiary funding review in England. It is a government (not an independent) review conducted by panel members, appointed by Ministers committed to the market. The review will report directly to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor Philip Hammond and Damian Hinds, the new Education Secretary - the first two of whom have publicly supported variable fees.
The new Universities Minister, Sam Gymiah, has wisely rowed back on initial, ill-considered suggestions that fees will vary by subject. So what other options do Ministers have in mind ? Philip Hammond for one is on record suggesting that fees could be linked to graduate destinations - in other words wages. He may not be alone in this.

The key determinant in early career salaries is family background and socio-economic class.If fees were set on this basis, it is inevitable that the universities which educate the majority of students from a wide range of backgrounds would lose out. Graduates who enter the creative industries often pursue portfolio careers with low levels of income initially - and there is the thorny question of regional differentiations in wages. None of these points may trouble the panel or the government. After all, the review will report prior to the next general election.

Crucially, there is no suggestion that teaching grant would be restored to cover any loss of university income if variable fees were imposed. Theresa May has also made clear that the review will be constrained by current economic and Treasury policy - in other words, there will be no more money. It may be possible to be more imaginative in divvying upon the current cake as has happened in Wales where a much more progressive funding and student support system has been adopted following the Diamond review. However, the terms of reference for the latter were very different and not hidebound by the ideology of the market.

The optimists may hope that the review will come-up with solutions to the devastating drop in part-time and mature student numbers - primarily the result of the much higher fees charged since 2012 - and that direct investment in FE will replace the advanced learner loans which those aged 19 and above have to take out if they want to study for level 3 courses and cannot afford the course fee - and that maintenance grants may be restored in part. Even this won't be a free lunch - someone other than the Treasury is likely to have to pick-up the tab.

However, the much bigger risk is that another Tory manifesto 'one-liner' is used to reframe the university sector based on spurious 'value for money' arguments, reducing investment in the higher education of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

If universities which do the heavy lifting in terms of social mobility are really in the sights of the government, it would be a sad reflection on the priorities and prejudices of Conservative Ministers and some of the Party's so-called political 'thinkers'. Nonetheless, it will be a convenient distraction from Brexit and allow the Government to suggest that any fall-out is of universities' own making for failing to compete and provide value for money in the market.

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

Review of Miseducation by Diane Reay

If only every parent and headteacher in England could read this book. It is so much more than an elegant summary of years of academic research. This is Diane Reay's own educational journey put in context. It's a deeply emotional and troubling tale, all the more so because the challenges she faced purely because of her own, poor background have only worsened for thousands of others like her - despite all the talk of social mobility.

The book plots the many historical and current obstacles to working class children making a success of our overly academic education. So much is structural – the way grammar schools and private schools continue to undermine comprehensives, the English addiction to setting and streaming, and a punitive love of high stakes testing.

Recent education policy has only worsened these traits. SATS in Year 6 are now pass or fail (with working class children far more likely to be declared "not secondary school ready"), existing grammars are gradually expanding, "differentiation" based on supposed ability is starting at an ever earlier age, the curriculum is increasingly academic, and private schools are in rude health.

As Reay crisply summarises: "If you wanted to design an educational system that discouraged and demoralised working-class children it would be hard to come up with anything as effective as the English one… The working classes have never had a fair chance in education."

But what Miseducation exposes so poignantly is the deep lack of educational confidence within working class culture. Only someone who grew up in that culture could have written this book. It is Reay's own, matter-of-fact descriptions of her sense of inadequacy that give her writing such credibility, alongside equally depressing interviews with the many working class students she has tracked over the years.

Reay elaborates on some of the consequences of this sense that educational success is not 'for them'. The first is peer pressure to mess around in class, which understandably fuels middle class anxiety about the local school. The second, as Reay documents in her research interviews, is a perception among some middle and upper class families that working class people are plain stupid. This government's fondness for boot camp, instruction-led "austerity education", as Reay calls it, only serves to reinforce this sense that working class people are little more than factory fodder who have no right to question and answer back.

Equally depressing are extracts from interviews with middle class parents who have committed to their local comprehensives, but remain determined that their child stays at the top of the class. The only thing I miss in Miseducation is the voice of the middle class parent (and Reay thinks they are in a distinct minority) who supports the local school because they want their own child's positive approach to education to rub off on as many of their peers as possible.

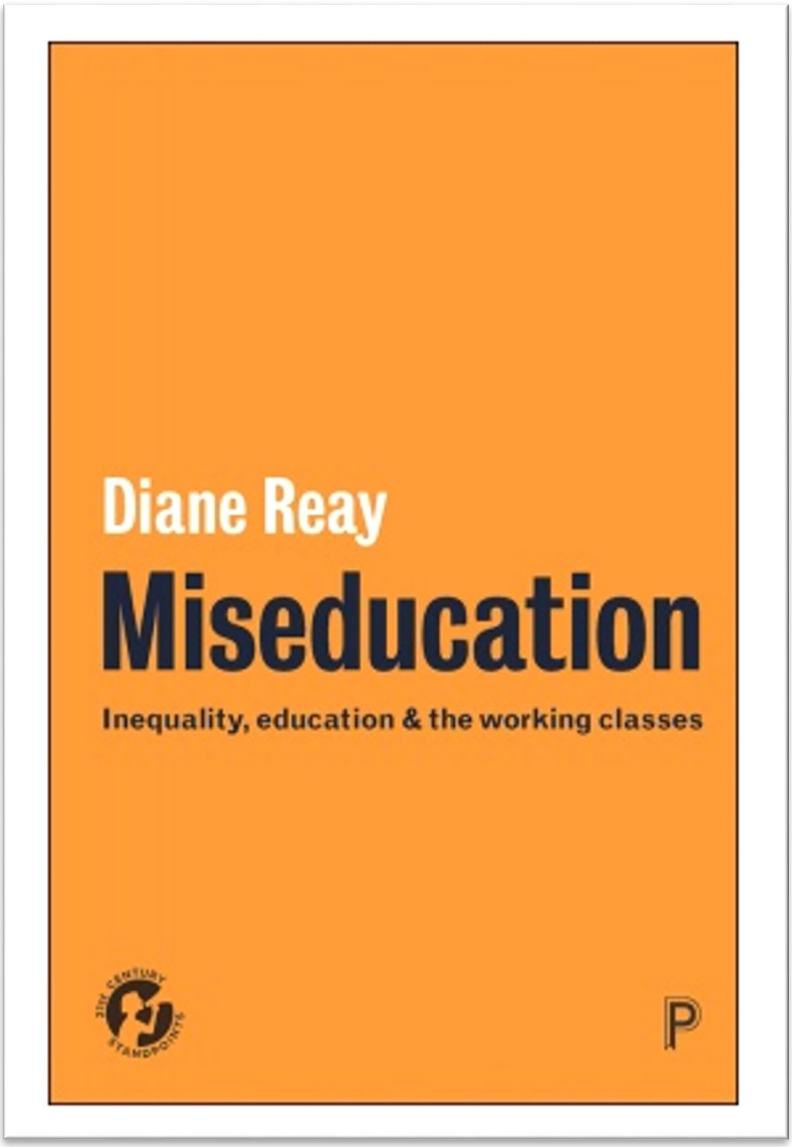
Reay writes convincingly of the 'class action' of the middle and upper class to maintain their children's advantage educationally. They do this through private tutoring and the like, and through the huge expansion in choice of schools and universities. This has ensured even greater segregation, as knowledgeable parents do everything they can to get their children into the "better" institutions.

Reay concludes that all the talk about social mobility is little more than "babble". She talks of the 'asset stripping' of working class communities as a minority of academically able children are encouraged to

climb the class ladder. Most movingly, she describes how working class students who have made this ascent so often end up feeling they have lost any sense of belonging and have betrayed their roots.

You come away from this book with such a strong sense of the visceral insensitivity in education (and beyond) towards working class values and experience. I saw this with my own eyes just recently. I was at an ostensibly progressive education conference. The presenter of a workshop on "character education" asked what kinds of values schools should encourage in their students. One senior member of staff replied without a hint of irony: "middle class values". No one said a word.

How do we change this landscape? Reay implores us to listen to the thirty years of evidence that setting in schools marginally benefits the few at the expense of the many. She calls for a sea-change in the way we think about, value and respect the working classes. But, above all, we need to stop seeing social mobility as an individual project. "The key point is that people like myself… want to rise with their class, not out of it. Yet the optimism, hope and desires that come with social mobility are doomed to disappointment because raising the class has to be a collective social endeavour." It's surely time to talk about England's last taboo. It's time to talk about class.



Madeleine Holt is an education campaigner. She runs the Meet the Parents social enterprise to encourage all families to support their local comprehensives. She has helped found Rescue Our Schools and More than a Score, and is working on setting up the Big Education Conversation. She was previously Culture Correspondent on Newsnight in a 20 year career at the BBC.

English, maths and equality of opportunity and aspiration

In new report, *Functional skills English and maths subject content: equality impact assessment*, published last month the DfE states that "the subject content should be accessible and appealing to all students regardless of ethnicity, gender, faith, disability, sexual orientation or maternity". 14-19 curricula has been riddled with re-inventions since the advent of YTS in the '80s and before, but its emphasis on "common", "core", "key" or "essential" skills has played a significant part in the personal, learning and employability potential of many learners during that time.

A foot on the ladder of employability

Those learners that are either excluded from school aged 14 plus, looked after children (LAC), those at risk and in need of safeguarding and child protection measures or with profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which includes high needs funding in alternative provision are often those who find it most difficult achieve in the UK's targets and standards driven curriculum. These young people, the most vulnerable in our education system and most at risk of falling out of it altogether, are often those most reliant on the life-line provided through various skills development programmes, while imperfect and in their most recent incarnation, known as functional skills. Accessing these qualifications is for many the best or only chance of getting a foot on the first rung of the employability ladder.

Findings and concerns with them

The report goes on to say that "equality is as much about equality of aspiration as it is about equality of opportunity". Fine words, but considering that DfE deems that overall the reformed Functional Skills English and mathematics subject content examined in this equality impact assessment will have a positive impact on equality of opportunity by providing respected qualifications in which students, employers and education providers can have full confidence, DfE considerations have been taken into account and they consider : " changes proposed are objectively justified because they will have the effect of improving standards and opportunities". However, concerns have been identified about the potentially negative impact of content.

Consultation and engagement with expert groups, along with a review of the available research, indicates that the risk of disproportionate impact on the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation is low.

The reformed Functional Skills English and mathematics subject content is intended to help raise the value of the qualification to students and education establishments, and its perception among employers. The DfE says it is confident that where this presents challenges to students with protected characteristics, there are a number of appropriate and available means of mitigation. These include the provision of good quality teaching and support to students experiencing difficulties, such as those with SEN or for whom English is not their first language. The quality of SEN teaching is central to ensuring pupils with SEN are given the best possible opportunities to achieve results in any of the Functional Skills qualifications considered here.

Further means of mitigation are already embedded in legislation or guidance, such as the reasonable adjustments.

Funding crisis

Equally serious are concerns around funding. DfE notes additional concerns within the consultation

that funds may not be available to allow reasonable adjustments to be made.

For 16-19 year olds, providers can access 'disadvantage funding' in order to make reasonable adjustments for individuals. This funding is allocated by formula within a provider's basic funding programme and is there to help meet the additional needs of students, including those with a disability or SEN.

For learners aged 19 and above who are funded by the Adult Education Budget, providers can access 'Learning Support funding' to help them meet the additional needs of adult students and meet the costs of reasonable adjustments as set out in the Equality Act 2010. Learning Support can cover a range of needs, including an assessment for dyslexia, funding to pay for specialist equipment or helpers, and arranging signers or note takers. Learning Support is also available to providers delivering apprenticeships or training funded by the Adult Education Budget.

The funding formula is, as ever, crucial and will determine whether this latest attempt in a 40 year campaign by UK governments to crack the 14-19 nut is any more effective than the sledgehammers employed by previous ones. The toolbox this time round comprises: a fixed monthly rate, where providers claim a fixed monthly rate for each student to fund support for example equipment, an interpreter, support worker; the provision of excess if support needs exceed the fixed monthly rate providers can claim excess costs and exceptional learning support for when support costs exceed £19,000.

While the curriculum has been getting narrower and more functional with each re-write, innovative teachers have found ways of promoting and developing the wider skills of team -work, problem solving, self-reflection and learning to learn alongside the basic skills of English and maths. If the impact of this paper really does convince the FE sector and training providers that equality is as much about equality of aspiration as it is about equality of opportunity then the balanced and broad curriculum we have lost might be back on the agenda. I'm not holding my breath. This just might be a further attack on working class skills by making the functional skills merely functional.

Ian Duckett is Curriculum and Quality Manager (and acting Centre Manager) at St Edmunds, an alternative provider in Norwich and a member of the SEA's NEC.

Interested in joining the Socialist Education Association?

You can join here:

https://socialisteducationalassociation.org/join-the-sea/

You can follow us on twitter at:

@SocialistEdu

An up to date list of local events can be found here:

https://socialisteducationalassociation.org/category/events/

Forthcoming events

SEA Meetings

Sat 12th May Cardiff

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

The next Socialist Educational Association Cymru meeting will be with the National Executive and members of the SHA Cymru and will take place on:

Saturday 12 May 2018, at 2pm-4pm, in the committee room, (it's upstairs near the lift at the back) at The Yard Pub, Brewery Quarter, St Mary Street, Cardiff.

The topic for discussion will be, the new responsibilities for local government and health boards under the, Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act.

The speakers will be Mr Michael Imperato, solicitor with an interest in educational law and independent member of the Cardiff and the Vale Health Board and Dr Michael Newman, SEA Cymru secretary and educationalist.

The SHA (Socialist Health Association) is also affiliated to the Labour Party and Welsh Labour but that does not mean you have to be party members as well so do join us and spread the word.

Please note that as the meeting is on a Saturday, many of us stay for a drink down stairs then go out for a meal. Last year we went to Cotes in Mill Lane.

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.

Education Politics (issn 1354-2029) is the journal of the Socialist Educational Association.
The articles reflect the views of their authors and not the SEA unless indicated otherwise.
Editor: Anne Heavey (editor@socialisteducationalassociation.org)
SEA General Secretary: John Bolt. email: secretary@socialisteducationalassociation.org
Join the Labour affiliated Socialist Education Association. Details from the General Secretary – membership £25 per year