Education Policy Commission Consultation: Socialist Educational Association response.

1.   What should a National Education Service be for and what values should it and the draft charter embody?

The NES exists to provide opportunities for learners of all ages to develop their personal well-being, to enable them to make a positive contribution to society and to help them achieve their full potential. It also exists to help to meet the collective needs of society including the promotion of social cohesion and inclusion, greater equality, environmental sustainability and economic well-being. It needs to reflect the challenges of globalisation and of technological change such as AI

2.   What amendments, if any, should be made to the principles outlined in the draft charter for the National Education Service?

- Principle 1 is too narrow. Labour needs to challenge the narrow approach to education that has been promoted since 2010. Education should promote not just the acquisition of knowledge but the mastery of a wide range of skills and the development of personal qualities and values that will support our vision of the good society.
- A core purpose of the NES should be to promote greater equality and to enhance social cohesion. This should be more explicit, perhaps in Principles 4 and 5. A comprehensive system in which children from all backgrounds learn together is of critical importance to these objectives.
- Principle 6 (and the other principles) do not adequately address how the content of the curriculum will be developed and how the achievement of learners will be assessed across the whole age range.
- The commitment to free (to the user) education (Principle 2) needs to be accompanied by a commitment to adequate levels of funding for all stages of education.
- Principle 5 should be developed to include broader issues around the welfare and wellbeing of children and young people building on the original Every Child Matters agenda.

3   What additional principles should be considered for the charter of the NES?

- The principles need to commit to placing the voice of the learner at the centre of the education system. The tone of the document at present is too "top down"
- Establishing a National Education Service should not be at the expense of the ability of local communities to influence the provision of education in their area.

4   What barriers currently exist to cooperation between education institutions, and what steps can be taken to remove them and ensure that cooperation is a central principle of our education system?

The most fundamental barriers which prevent effective co-operation are:

- Basing the system on competition and marketisation which means that institutional self-interest becomes the central driver rather than the needs of learners and society at large.
- The system of multi academy trusts.
- An incoherent regulatory system, confusion and conflict between local and national roles and the lack of a local democratic framework for education.
- Accountability measures which do not reflect the real values and purpose of education

Actions designed to promote co-operation would include:

- a statutory duty on all educational institutions to collaborate in meeting the needs of learners and a duty on local and national government to promote collaboration.
- establish a planned system rather than a competitive one – eg ensure that post 1992 universities are not undermined by unrestricted competition from Russell Group and others.

- reform the regulatory system and base it around local communities not different types of institution – eg all schools and colleges (though not HE) to be commissioned by and accountable to the same local regulator and to their wider community.
- end the privatisation of schools and colleges in particular through the academy system
- reform the accountability regime so that institutions are encouraged to co-operate rather than compete – eg reporting student achievement on an area basis rather than by individual school so that schools are collectively responsible for all students in the area.

5. **Through which channels and mechanisms should the public be able to hold educational institutions to account, and how should this vary across different educational bodies?**

- All institutions should have governance arrangements that represent parents (where appropriate), students, staff and the wider community.
- Accountability should as far as possible be local. National government has shown itself incapable of managing schools and colleges directly. It should confine itself to ensuring that local systems are efficient and consistent. Higher education may be an exception in that universities are not based so much on local communities.
- Local accountability should be to democratically elected bodies working through open and transparent procedures not commissioners appointed by central government and operating behind closed doors.
- League tables and inspections should be reformed to reduce stress on staff and to remove perverse incentives such as narrowing the curriculum and teaching exclusively to the test.
- Given the incoherence of current local government arrangements, there should be a comprehensive review of local and regional government in England with a view to devolving more decision making to local areas in ways that are consistent and efficient. In the short term, encourage smaller local authorities to combine in order to deliver educational responsibilities more efficiently.

6. **What can we do to reduce the fragmentation of the education system, and to move towards an approach that is integrated and promotes lifelong learning?**

- Give local democratic bodies the responsibility for planning and ensuring the effective delivery of educational provision across all ages and phases for their area. End the free school system.
- Recognise that selective and private education help to embed privilege and inequality in the education system but do not contribute to the raising of standards. Work towards the elimination of all academic selection before 16 and the integration of current selective and private schools into a national comprehensive system.
- To reduce current levels of socio-economic selection found in many areas, no school should be its own admission authority; admission criteria should be set and implemented by local democratic bodies and should treat all schools and all families fairly and equally.
- Build the capacity of mainstream schools, colleges, universities and lifelong learning settings so as to improve opportunities for the inclusion of disabled pupils and students with/without SEN.
- There should be a commitment to a radical reduction in the burden of testing and to establishing a process for curriculum revision based on the principles of the NES, free of detailed ministerial interference and with the participation of all relevant parties.
- Address the issue of children without a school place and the practice of "off-rolling" by some schools.
- Provide comprehensive support for the more disadvantaged areas of the country through long term programmes not short-term "quick fixes".
- improve transition from early years settings to school and from school to further education or work. Develop a universal and effective service of careers, information and guidance for all young people.

(see also answers to question 4)

7. **How do we improve the quality of early years education, in particular with relation to qualifications and staffing levels?**

- All settings should be led by graduate early years professionals.
- Terms, conditions and career opportunities need to be improved for all early years staff.
- Base early years provision on the best understanding of child development and individual needs rather than promoting the blanket introduction of more formal teaching methods.
- Restore the Sure Start network, focusing growth on the most disadvantaged areas.

8. **How do we achieve genuine parity of esteem between academic and vocational/technical education? How do we improve outcomes for those young people who do not choose to follow what is seen as the traditional academic route?**

- A pre-requisite is greater parity of esteem and reward in the workplace
- Ensure all pupils follow a broad curriculum up to 16 which includes academic, artistic and technical subjects.
- Talk the talk – stop referring to purely academic institutions as if they are in some way superior to others.
- Promote wherever possible comprehensive post 16 institutions or clusters of institutions. Stop the creation of highly selective post 16 institutions.
- Accountability measures should not put greater weight on academic subjects rather than technical ones. This includes the so-called EBac and the focus on particular academic A levels
- Continue the development of high quality technical qualifications as set out in the Sainsbury Review.
- Reform admissions/ transfer at 16 to ensure that all young people are able to exercise a fully informed choice for the next stage of their education

9. **What can be done to ensure that the NES has the staff it needs, in particular with reference to the ongoing crisis in teacher recruitment and retention?**

- End the pay freeze. Re-establish national contracts for all school staff that will enable career progression and include a transparent pay structure and standardised terms and conditions.
- Address the excessive pressures caused by the accountability regime at all levels in the education system
- Respect the professionalism of all staff and reduce political interference in professional issues such as the curriculum and assessment.
- Require all institutions (especially universities) to adopt fair employment practices and ensure that they are properly accountable for their use of public resources.

10. **What steps can be taken, at both the training stage and during continuing professional development (CPD), to ensure that teachers and support staff have the knowledge and resources they need to teach the whole curriculum? For instance, with reference to mandatory, age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE).**

- All teachers should have or be working towards qualified status
- Reform initial teacher education so as to ensure that all new teachers have a proper grounding in professional skills and knowledge. This should involve restoring the role of higher education as an essential element of ITE
- All staff should have an entitlement to CPD. There needs to be a coherent and consistent structure to ensure that this entitlement is a reality rather than the current random spread of opportunities.
- All schools should participate in local networks and school to school support and development activities.
- ITE and CPD need to ensure that there are sufficient expert teachers of RSE and PSHE just as they need to do for all other curriculum specialisms.