

## ***EDUCATION: a vital tool for a MORE EQUAL SOCIETY***



**Rebecca Long Bailey MP**

For those in education, be that children, university students or apprentices, the future may seem unsure at the moment as our whole world is put on pause. But one thing we know for sure is that our education sector and all those who work in it, from teachers to support staff, have risen to the challenge spectacularly. Teaching staff across the country have kept children's education going whilst they are at home and schools have provided a vital service to vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

But as we look forward to life after Covid-19, and the reopening of schools, something that can only happen when it is unequivocally safe to do so, we must recognise that if we are to provide our children with a passport to their future, we cannot return to the status quo.

reliant on free school meals and food banks to keep food on the table each week. And for too many children, their life prospects are determined before they've even started secondary schools.

We cannot simply return to a system that has created these outcomes, now is the time to reform for the better, working with school leaders, teachers and all those who work in schools. After all, they are the frontline and they know what is best for children's and young adults' education.

We can't just applaud the work of schools in supporting the nation's children. A better way to show we appreciate their value is to start giving schools the resources they need after a decade of deep cuts to school budgets and local council support services.

This means addressing

The inequalities we knew existed between children have been laid bare for all to see. We cannot try to gloss over them. Too many children are living in poverty, many of whom are in working households. Too many families are

structural problems in education which affect children's schooling such as the pressure placed on teachers and their workload, the unsustainably low teacher retention rate, the form of exams and assessments at all school stages and the way achievement at a school level is measured. We must also end the creeping commercialisation of education and return academies to local control.

The Labour Party has said we will replace Ofsted with a new body with responsibility for inspections, designed to drive school improvement and we will scrap the planned new baseline assessment test for children starting school. These are just two examples of the measures needed to reform our education system. This crisis has shown that there is more than one way of providing education, awarding qualifications and measuring success; we must build on that.

We must look again at our education system to ensure that access to a good education is truly a right for every single child, whatever their circumstances and that teaching staff are valued as they should be.

Education is indeed the passport to the future, but it is also one of our most vital tools in rebuilding a more equal society.

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## About *Education Politics*

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# On the cusp: Edu time of Corona

Ian Duckett

In recent times I have been the designated safeguarding lead in three educational settings, including an alternative provision attended (or more often not) by some extremely vulnerable young people. In the present pandemic I have been working in the guise of educator.

Nothing I have experienced in these roles has challenged my view that barriers to learning are neither purely educational concerns to be addressed by teachers nor problems to be solved by social workers. In almost all cases they existed and continue to exist on the cusp of education and social care.

At the heart of this argument is of course the ground-breaking legislation by Labour in 2003 and pockets of local initiatives that pre-dated and influenced it and which gave birth to the barely still breathing Sure Start project.

Every Child Matters (ECM), the radical government initiative for England and Wales that was launched in 2003, at least partly in response to the death of Victoria Climbié, is one of the most important policy initiatives ever introduced and development in relation to children and children's services ever. It led in the short to medium term to massive and progressive advances to the children and families agenda, leading to the Children Act 2004. ECM covers children and young adults up to the age of 19, or 24 for those with disabilities and it is important (especially perhaps in the time of Coronavirus) to remember its keynotes:

- stay safe
- be healthy
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being

As well as my own harrowing experiences and observations ranging from victims of abuse and violence to hunger and neglect, the SEA seminar, entitled, Vulnerable Children and the Lock Down, on the 16th April provided some valuable input. One issue has been the provision of free school meal vouchers. In usual fake tory so called "value for money" solutions, it has been out sourced to a company with inadequate IT to deal with the demand. There are families who are starving because of it. One of the children I have been dealing with in Norwich only engages at all so that he can get a daily Aldi meal deal voucher. There are similar stories in a number of London boroughs.

The BBC's Newsnight Special Coronavirus: How Britain's invisible children are being forgotten, broadcast on the 9th April

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(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0892xt2>) also provided great insight into the social, economic and health crises. The numbers of at-risk children taking their crisis place in a school is frighteningly low and the most economically disadvantaged are without the free school meals service, in some areas as low as 10%.

Newington Green School in Islington was featured. It is in an area, though often seen as leafy and well to do houses and schools, with some of the most deprived children in the UK. The N1 postcode is on all kinds of cusps.

Simon Bailey, the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on child protection told BBC Newsnight: "A worryingly low number of vulnerable children allocated a school place in England to keep them safe during the coronavirus crisis are actually turning up". In some areas just a quarter of the "at risk" children who are meant to be in school are attending, the programme has been told. Norfolk is the only local authority to have reported an official figure. It is 13%. In some areas the figure is below 10%. A head teacher said that she believes those officially deemed "at risk" were "only the tip of the iceberg".

Children who would probably be taken into care under normal circumstances, where a more specialised provision would be available are having to be dealt with in a wholly inadequate mainstream provision. Teachers and social workers are on the front line and having to have contact with children and their parents at their own risk.

The remedy for this, of course, as it was in 2003 and always has been is to achieve economic well-being for all of our young people.

This can only be done by preparing learners for employment and economic, independent living through training providers', proper apprenticeships and work.

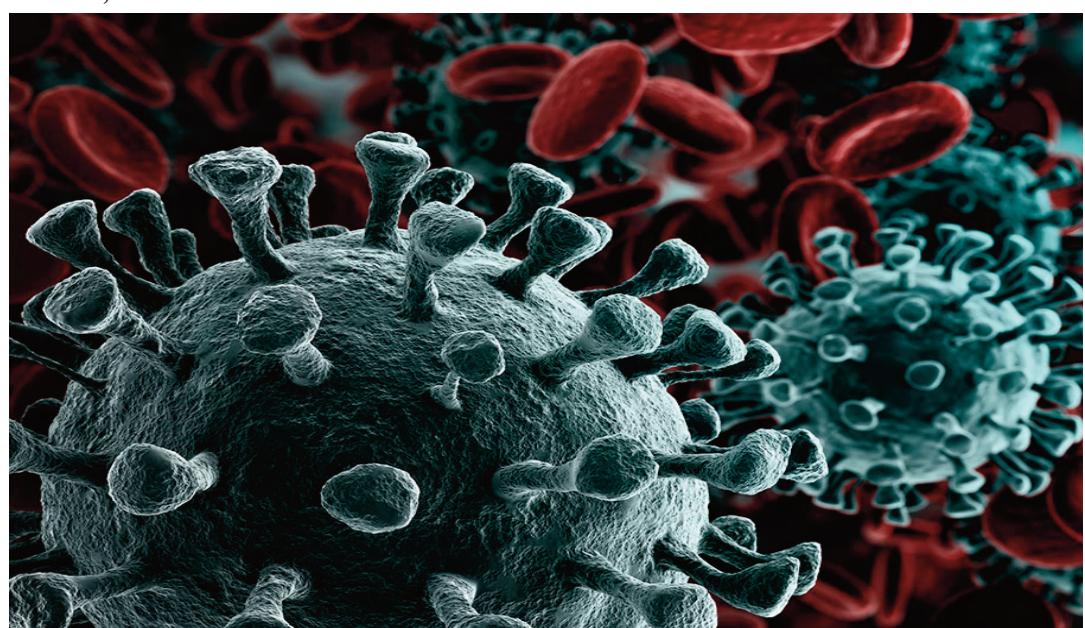
The following characteristics would provide the evidence for young learners achieving economic well-being:

- examples of the development of learners' self-confidence;
- learners' involvement and achievement in enterprise activities;
- learners developing employability skills;
- learners engaging in team building and teamwork;
- learners' access to, and take-up of, careers education, advice and guidance;
- personal finance education
- work experience;
- work-based learning.

Information, advice and guidance must be evidenced by:

- careers advice and guidance;
- a schedule of one-to-one interviews.

The real fear is that the inequalities inherent in a social class rigged education system will be exacerbated by the pandemic school closure in a Michael Gove inspired wet dream with a well-resourced affluent middle-class keeping up with and getting ahead of the school curriculum and an army of disadvantaged youngster with no resource and no encouragement. A work-related curriculum needs to be rooted in a meaningful skills-based curriculum with transferable skills as its spine and entitlement at its heart and engagement, life-skills and literacy in its blood.



# **Participatory democracy in authority school system**

**Richard Hatcher**

We know why we are against academies. The principles and the evidence are clear. But what are we for? The return of academies to a local authority school system, but what sort of local authority system? This is a crucial question to answer for two reasons.

First, many younger teachers and support staff, and most parents of school students, have little or no idea of what good well-funded local authorities were and could do.

Second, many school staff and parents have positive experiences of academies and might be unconvinced that they should be abolished and integrated into a local authority system. Many MATs are not controlled by a sponsoring trust and their formation was often motivated by schools seeking mutual support when local authorities could no longer provide it, rather than by any support for academisation as a policy. The failings and malpractices of certain academy chains have been well documented, but they do not apply to all sponsored academy trusts. In any case, parents of pupils at sponsored academy chains may have little awareness of the negative aspects and judge the school just by how well their children get on.

## **What should local authorities in education be for?**

The functions that a properly funded and staffed local authority should carry out would include being responsible for:

- the provision of school places
- admissions policy
- the employment of school staff on national pay scales
- providing or ensuring support for schools where necessary
- ensuring appropriate provision and support for SEND pupils
- providing various 'back office' functions: legal, HR, etc.

But these don't address two more fundamental, and interdependent, issues. First, what conception of the purposes of education should be the basis of local authority policy? And second, what should be the relationship between the local authority, the schools and the community?

Michael Fielding and Peter Moss's book *Radical Education and the Common School: a democratic alternative*, published in 2011, offers some answers:

The meaning of 'radical education' is not self-evident, indeed it is highly contentious. [...] We, however, anchor our definition of radical in a particular value: for us, participatory democracy is at the heart of radical education.' (p41)

A radical education built on the value of democracy and a multidimensional understanding of democracy expresses itself in a variety of ways: in the way educational politics and policy-making are conducted: in the governance of schools and decision-making large and small; in processes of learning and concepts of knowledge adopted; in ways of evaluation; and in everyday practices and relationships. (p42)

## **The local authority and the community**

For Fielding and Moss the education of children is the responsibility of every citizen in the community, not just the responsibility of parents.

All citizens, we repeat, have an interest in and responsibility for the education of children. (p122)

But the local and democratic political community – the local authority – also should have responsibility for the education of its children, indeed more broadly for the relationship between its children and the community. This does not mean going back to a situation where local authorities manage schools

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directly. (p123)

...local authorities define a local cultural project of education for their community, a collective vision for the area, in relationship with schools, local communities and citizens, and also in relationship with a common national policy that defines radical democratic education and the common school as two of its broad aims. (p124)

## **Participatory democracy in the local authority**

We can apply Fielding and Moss's argument to the internal structures and processes of the local authority itself, opening them up to the participation of all the stakeholders. A framework is provided by two recent Labour Party documents which argue for an extension of participatory democracy. Neither of them specifically addresses it either in local government or in the school system, but they can be used to support the case for it.

The Labour Party Consultation Paper 'Democratic Public Ownership' was published in September 2018 with an introduction by John McDonnell and Rebecca Long-Bailey. The core argument of the report is that:

An organisation, and indeed sector, should be run by the people who have the experience, skills, knowledge, and competence to do this. However, this is always a collective learning process and is done best where the considerable diverse knowledges of the workforce and citizenry are brought together to inform the decision-making process.

There is [...] considerable evidence to suggest that greater "co-production" of public services – the involvement of citizens in how public services are produced – does produce beneficial effects in terms of performance, as well as making public services more accountable to citizens and enhancing people's sense of ownership and support.

In June 2019 the Labour Party developed the policy of participation further in the report From Paternalism to Participation: Putting civil society at the heart of national renewal.

Labour wants people to have a bigger say over the public decisions and the public services that affect them, with more direct accountability to service users where possible.

We will promote collaborative decision making, encouraging public service providers to involve their service users in taking decisions about how those services are run, the outcomes they are working towards, and the support they offer. This cannot be limited to consultation alone – people need the power to assert their voice when those in power refuse to listen, and civil society has an important role in acting as their advocates and champions. This will mark a radical change from top-down approach to public services and put services users and front-line workers in the driving seat.

Although these documents do not explicitly address local government, they establish some principles and arguments which are very relevant to local authorities in education, opening them up to democratic participation by citizens, and especially by 'service users' and 'service workers', in strategic policy-making at Council House and Town Hall level.

## **A Local Education Forum representing all the stakeholders**

The key reform would be for each local authority to establish an advisory Education Forum with representatives on it of the various categories of people with a stake in the local school system. These would include teachers, headteachers and support staff in primary and secondary schools. The Forum should also include representatives of Early Years staff and of other professionals connected to schools, such as social workers. There should also be representatives of the relevant unions. And the Education Forum should of course also include representatives of parents, school governors and school students.

Local councillors would also have places on the Forum, perhaps with proportional party representation. They would be in a minority on the Forum, but fundamental decisions about local education would lie, as now, with the elected councillors of the local Council.

The Education Forum would enable a new configuration of representative and participatory democracy in local education policy-making at the authority-wide level, revolving around the politics of voice and the politics of knowledge: whose voices, whose knowledge and what kinds of knowledge count in educational governance. However, public participation does not mean inappropriate intervention in issues which are properly matters of professional judgement.

### **Seconding school staff to the local authority**

There is an additional measure which would both strengthen the professional capacity of the local authority and remove any concerns about its role: seconding school staff to the local authority for limited periods of time in order to contribute to local authority policy development and implementation, especially by providing support for other schools. These secondments would involve headteachers and other senior staff and subject specialists, and could range from, for example, a day a week to whole terms, with appropriate recompense for the school. The outcomes would be the sharing of knowledge and expertise in the whole local education system and closer integration between schools and the local authority in the policy process.

### **Participatory democracy and conflicting class interests in education**

Participatory democracy does not imply that public views are inevitably progressive. While within the local school system many differences of view involve no fundamental conflict of interests and consensus, or at least the acceptance of difference, can be reached through discussion, some involve conflicting class, gender and ethnic group interests where no consensus or acceptance of difference is possible.

The question that then arises is what strategy has the potential to increase democratic participation in governance in the school system while preventing it from becoming hegemonised by and incorporated into dominant oppressive agendas? The answer lies in the experience of social movements, including of course trade unions, which have organised collectively for progressive

educational policies and for democratic participation in governance, including the boycotts of SATs and the campaigns against academies and cuts in school budgets. What are lacking are forums for popular participation in governance in the local school system into which these campaigns could feed.

### **How can the Local Education Forum influence the Council?**

The vast majority of councils in England employ the Cabinet and Scrutiny model, introduced by Tony Blair in 2000. This has imported into local councils a highly-centralised and hierarchical business model of governance by a small group of leading councillors comprising the Cabinet. They are supposed to be held to account by the Scrutiny Committees, though their effectiveness is questionable.

In this context the danger is that collaborative discussion about policy would take place in the Education Forum but it would have no direct input into where the key strategic policy decisions are made, and could simply be ignored when its deliberations were regarded as unwelcome by the Council leadership.

The answer is for the Council to establish an advisory committee comprising the Cabinet member for education, the chair of the Scrutiny Committee for education, and other key councillors as appropriate, together with elected representatives of the Education Forum who could bring issues and proposals from it to engage directly with the top-level Council decision-makers. Of course this doesn't guarantee agreement, but it does at least enable dialogue and pressure and the possibility of agreement.

### **Varied forms of Local Education Forums**

The principle of Local Education Forums is that they embody and enable participatory democracy. The exact form they take should be determined by what people want and through practical experience of trying them out. For example, the authority-wide Education Forum might be split into two: Early Years and primary, and secondary and post-school, Forums. The same might apply in terms of the education advisory committee with



the Council. It's a matter for local determination by the participants.

Authorities vary in geography from London boroughs and towns such as Stoke-on-Trent to large county authorities such as Staffordshire which raise the question of the viability of a single local Education Forum for the whole authority because of the travelling times involved. It may be necessary to have more than one Forum, each for a different area within the county, perhaps based around two or more major towns, with representatives from each on a small authority-wide coordinating group.

In addition, Councils should set up digital networks to enable genuine online participatory democracy – not just consultations - in policy-making, like Decidim - We Decide - in Barcelona.

## Neighbourhood Education Forums

The idea of participatory Education Forums bringing all stakeholders together can also apply at the level of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is the scale at which the densest interpersonal interactions take place and it is a significant locus of people's identity. The institutions, community organisations, activities and people in the neighbourhood are a rich resource for local schools. A Neighbourhood Education Forum could bring them all together to

discuss interests, concerns and ideas, and then feed their views into the authority-wide Education Forum. Again, face-to-face deliberation can be supplemented, though not replaced, by digital technology.

## Will people want to take part in Education Forums?

We know that there are low levels of public trust and participation in political processes, as evidenced by the low percentage of voting in local council elections. But we also know that people will get involved if they think it matters and they can make a difference, as we have seen in numerous campaigns including those by parents against academies and school cuts. So participatory democracy needs time to develop, as people learn through experience of its effectiveness. And measures need to be continually taken to ensure equality in participation, challenging patterns of exclusion including by gender, ethnicity, level of education, and confidence and experience in public participation. Participatory democracy in the local school system could be a practical laboratory in which new social identities and a new solidaristic culture can be formed, challenging dominant policies and power structures which sustain social injustices and taking forward progressive radical education for all.

# **Higher Education: the new reality**

**Pam Tatlow** is a member of SEA's National Executive. She was Chief Executive of MillionPlus, the Association for Modern Universities from 2014-2017

On Good Friday, Universities UK (UUK) the trade association for universities in the UK (or their Vice-Chancellors to be more precise), released a £2bn call for government investment to help address the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the sector. Surprisingly given the impact on students, would-be students and staff, this begins with a plea for the Treasury to increase research funding. There is nothing unusual about this. The 20 universities that receive almost 75% of the billions of pounds that taxpayers provide each year for research, are the ones whose voices tend to hold most sway in UUK's internal discussions. And it's not just the research 'ask' where their influence is evident.

It is well-known that the Tories remain wedded to a market in higher education. Having substituted direct funding via teaching grants with student tuition fees of £9000 per year in 2012, student numbers were deregulated by George Osborne in 2015/16. Prior to this universities in England were allocated student numbers with a tolerance band of 5% based on an institution's predicted growth strategy.

UUK has now proposed a one-year student number 'mechanism' – but one that still allows universities to trade on their historic reputations. To the outsider, the proposals may seem reasonable enough: for 2020/21 each university in England and Wales would be allowed to recruit UK and EU-domiciled undergraduate students up to the number submitted by institutions in December 2019 to the Office for Students and Higher Education Funding Council in Wales - plus an additional 5%. Needless to say, according to UUK in 2021/22, normal business will resume and the market and competition will once again reign supreme.

This is hopeless - and a sleight of hand for a number of reasons. The December 2019 numbers

are forecasts that took no account of the coronavirus pandemic let alone UUK's own admission that at least 15% of students may defer entry in 2020/21. Even this may downplay the problem because no-one is yet certain whether universities will be able to open their doors to all new and returning students in late September. There's also the practical problem of students finding accommodation if they want to live away from home.

Put UUK's proposal another way, if a university's December 2019 student number forecast was 100, the university can recruit 105 – but this is a number that totally disregards a potential deferral rate of 15%. Under the latter scenario, the likely number of students recruited would be circa 87. This translates into millions of pounds in lost tuition fees across the sector over a 3-year course.

UUK asserts that all 'providers' (as universities and colleges offering HE are now described) must 'channel their offers through the Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS) in a transparent way'. Proposed sanctions are weak. There is little to stop universities in the Russell Group hoovering up students by making offers well below the norm to reach their +5%. Smaller universities including those that historically have specialised in teacher, early years and professional health education (think nursing and others crucial for the NHS) stand to be most at risk. And don't let's forget that those university rankings which some universities wear as a badge of marketing honour, are run by commercial organisations and hugely influenced by research funding.

Then there's international students. Unsurprisingly given the over-reliance of some universities on international students, UUK has spelt out in much detail the grim consequences if these students also don't rock-up. In reality, the pandemic may well have changed the global higher education market forever. However, even in the short-term, the UK and the US may be regarded as less safe destinations than they once were.

Recent research has revealed a mark-up of roughly £5k on the fees paid by international students compared to the costs of actually teaching them. If there is a bail-out, the government (and Labour) should insist that in future, universities in England should be required to demonstrate that they are financially stable without international students, not because of them.

UUK is silent on proposals that would provide new study opportunities for those thrown out of work by the pandemic, whose companies may not survive and for others who want to refocus their careers as a result of the crisis. University is not just for young people but it is well-known that mature students are much less keen on debt. Experiences of the lockdown and its consequences are hardly likely to have changed their minds. In fact, once the straitjacket of marketisation and student fees are set aside, it is not hard to draft schemes that create new study opportunities for those whose work and employment have collapsed.

Needless to say, UUK is at pains to point out that “Achieving stability in the higher education sector following COVID-19” represents a united front, agreed by all universities. If past practice is anything to go by, it is likely to have been preceded by last minute demands that everyone signs up – or else there will be less Treasury money on the table.

Unfortunately, UUK’s ‘united front’ has been put together without any input from the NUS, UCU or the unions that represent other staff. In the majority of cases, universities’ senior teams and staff have stepped up to the plate to manage a crisis that has resulted in students being sent home, taught on-line, trying to recover accommodation fees from private providers and in many cases, losing the part-time jobs that help to off-set living and study costs.

In addition to switching teaching on-line, staff have (among other things) worked out how to award degrees, manage the entry into the workforce early of nursing students and others - but inevitably some staff have also been ‘furloughed’. A golden opportunity, not only to think outside of the market box, but also to build consensus and make common cause with the organisations that represent students and staff has been lost.

This, of course, is where a deregulated market and a high dependency on student fees, take you. The UK government will not allow any university

to go under in 2020/21. Thereafter, it’s anyone’s guess and UUK unhelpfully pledges that universities will continue to seek efficiencies and cut costs – not a message likely to go down well with staff.

Contrast this with New Zealand whose government moved rapidly to announce a lockdown and amend the Education Act so that universities became subject to government direction. There have been no complaints from universities which usually value their autonomy. As the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, posted on its website “We are all in this together.”

Belatedly UUK has smelt some of the coffee. No doubt encouraged by MillionPlus, the Association for Modern Universities, the two organisations have submitted a ‘tweaked’ proposal to the Treasury. This suggests that students and graduates aiming to become key workers should receive maintenance grants of £10,000 and have their loans written-off if they remain in the relevant professions for 5 years. In addition, a new Higher Education Capital Fund would be created alongside more investment in teaching and enhanced training and staffing budgets in the public sector itself.

It’s a start, it’s not enough and all of the other problems remain. Crucially, UUK’s proposed ‘bail-out’ does nothing to turn the clock back on a decade of marketisation.

This is why Labour’s 2019 manifesto with its insistence on an end to the market as well as free tuition, is more relevant than ever. In and outside Parliament, Labour’s job is to work with universities, students, staff and their trade unions, to ensure that the government sees them through the crisis – but the future cannot be more of the same.

Labour must set out a new long-term reality for higher education based on collaboration, a return to stability, direct funding, maintenance grants, new opportunities for those who want to study (or return to study) later in life and an end to the market which has done so much damage to higher education. It’s just a shame that it has taken an awful global pandemic to reveal that the market mantra of the last decade is so threadbare.

# **Supply Staff**

**Melanie Griffiths**

Supply teaching and other casual work is by its nature precarious but it has its advantages for the worker in terms of flexibility. However, over the last few decades due to the deregulation, fragmentation, privatisation and underfunding of our public services the disadvantages of working in this way have become more acute.

In education the deregulation process in England and Wales, was begun by the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). Over the years funding has been steadily transferred from Local Authority central services and given directly to schools. School leaders have been given the “opportunity” to opt out of using Local Authority provided services and look for “best value”.

The headteacher and nominally the governing body are now in control of the school’s budget. They, guided by the business manager, decide how and where to spend this money. This “freedom” for schools to spend money however they like has opened the way to outsourcing and the birth of the private supply teacher agency.

Under the Blair government school funding was good, and schools were still happy in the main to pay supply teachers to scale. Often schools engaged known competent supply teachers directly or accessed them from local authority supply pools. There were private agencies but they were just part of the mix. However, after the 2007 general election, in the age of austerity school leaders and business managers began to look for more and more savings.

In England and, to a large extent Wales, schools are now businesses. Schools which are academies or are part of multi academy trusts actually have a CEO. A business when strapped for cash will look for savings. Over the decades since 1988 all the tools have been put in place to drive down the pay and conditions of supply teachers. The introduction of the cover supervisor post (an unqualified, non-teaching supervisory role), the demise of the local authority supply pool, the proliferation of competing private supply agencies combined with underfunding has meant that the vast majority of supply teachers now have



significantly poorer pay than their permanent colleagues.

Most supply teachers have no access to the teacher’s pension scheme, very limited if any access to in service training and little protection from poor employment practices. For example, an experienced (UPS3) teacher could be paid just over half of the amount per day they would be paid if they were contracted to a school. After 12 weeks with same employer/hirer legislation requires that teachers should be paid to scale but some agencies don’t do this automatically and some try to avoid doing it by ending assignments before the 12-week point. Engagements are cancelled at the last minute, perhaps even while travelling to the school. Qualified teachers are offered work as cover supervisors further eroding their pay. Work is scarcer as schools use cheaper, sometimes unqualified inhouse education workers to cover classes.

On the face of it a supply of cheap education cover staff is attractive to school business managers in control of shrinking budgets but of course staff procurement should be about more than cost.

The Covid-19 crisis has laid bare the many inefficiencies caused by the deregulation, fragmentation and privatisation of our public services. Many are saying we cannot go back to business as usual when the crisis ends. We must make sure that that is the case. We must demand secure jobs and integrated, holistic public services.

Even the Financial Times (April 3rd 2020 -Virus lays bare the frailty of the social contract) recognises that we need, "Radicalreforms –

reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades".... "Governments will have to accept a more active role in the economy. They must see public services as investments rather than liabilities, and look for ways to make labour markets less insecure"...."Countries that have allowed the emergence of an irregular and precarious labour market are finding it particularly hard to channel financial help to workers with such insecure employment."

This has been particularly true for supply educators working in England and Wales who have had no choice but to work in schools through many different types of agency. As I write some supply staff are still fighting to be furloughed by their agency, being told by an outsourced umbrella payroll company that furlough means pay of 80% of the minimum wage, trying to convince headteachers to not cut short long-term engagements or are waiting to hear from the government how Local Authority supply pools will be able to compensate staff employed through them. It's a mess!

It doesn't have to be this way. In Scotland one document agreed with unions covered all supply teachers and guaranteed them an income to tide them over the Covid-19 crisis, because all teachers in Scotland are legally employees of the local authority. In Scotland the 1988 Education Reform Act didn't apply. In Scotland there are no private supply agencies for supply staff. Here the LA has not been cut out of education to the same extent as it has been in England and Wales. Funding does not go directly from government to school. Money to schools is allocated via the Local Authority and the Local Authority make decisions on how far schools can control their own budget. The Local Authority still provide many central support services and that includes maintaining a local authority supply pool where schools can access supply staff with the same pay and conditions as other comparable workers permanently employed in schools. In their "Devolved school management guidelines" (25th June 2019) the Scottish Government states "Local Authorities, and their headteachers, are expected to demonstrate accountability at all levels, be clear and transparent, support collegiate working and strive to deliver national, local and school priorities". I am not saying Scotland is an educational utopia but policies followed there have prevented the free for

all and total system fragmentation that we are experiencing in England and Wales.

The advantages to bringing supply staff back in house are obvious for staff; a proper pay structure, access to the pension scheme, access to in service training, ability to organise within their trade union and have their rights recognised and upheld. However, in addition to this there are considerable advantages for schools too.

A properly maintained Local Authority supply pool with an easy to use digital platform would make it simple for schools to select suitably qualified staff, contact and engage them. No longer would schools be contacting several agencies to try to find a worker. They would have access to every registered supply teacher in the area and have confidence that these teachers have been thoroughly vetted and fairly interviewed by the LA. The agency system is inefficient. It's common for secondary schools to have to make do with a teacher who is not qualified in the subject they are covering. Teachers are travelling big distances to get to the school their agency has placed them with. A pool would mean schools could easier develop a relationship with a number of supply teachers close by. It is much better for schools to have supply teachers who regularly work with them as these teachers will be more efficient as they will know school system and the pupils. Historically supply teaching has been a way for schools to find staff they like and recruit them to permanent positions. An introduction through an agency however means a finder's fee of at least 10% of the candidate's gross annual salary. This obviously would not be the case if the introduction was through the Local Authority.

Over the last years Labour has recognised the problems that outsourcing of our public services has caused and has started to develop policies which if they had been elected would have begun to address this. Labour promised in their 2019 manifesto to set up "A new teacher supply service [which] will tackle the waste of funds going to private supply teacher agencies". This could be something in line with the Northern Ireland model where there is a register of supply staff and an on-line booking system. Although there was no detail on how this national supply service would work and how schools would have been compelled to use it, the commitment to bring the supply service back in house was welcome.

We are now in a very different place than we were last year. We must continue to work with the Labour Party to develop the idea of a national supply service but we must also press the government and other bodies to improve the situation now. We must work with trade unions and other groups to campaign for change. Headteachers need to be encouraged to employ supply teachers either directly or through Local Authority supply pools where they exist. We must encourage multi-academy trusts to directly engage a pool of in-house teachers, similar to the pool established in the Unity Schools Partnership. We must encourage councils, especially Labour councils to establish or where they already exist maintain and upgrade local supply pools.

Without repeating points made in the article it's important to stress that the SEA must now work in two main ways. In policy terms within the Labour Party we can build on the work the SEA has already done on democratising services and re-empowering Local Authorities. We now have an opportunity to work with a very radical shadow education secretary and a progressive leadership of the main teacher trade union.

While it's true nationally we are likely facing a Tory government for 4-5 years this is an example of a policy area where we could actually get a win. Nationally it is unlikely, but we could try to get incremental change through Labour councils and schools themselves. We need to develop a campaigning strategy. On an issue like this it is possible to build a coalition with the SEA promoting it. Many groups have a vested interest in doing something about how supply teachers are deployed to schools. Obviously, workers and their trade unions, school leaders who actually care about quality educational provision but most importantly parents. Because some of the main victims of marketisation of schools are children. Casualisation of the supply service is bad for children as it is bad for staff. An adequately resourced and integrated supply service where qualified teachers are paid properly and schools have the opportunity to work with staff trained to do the job that they are being employed to do means a better service for all our children.

When lockdown is over we cannot go back to business as usual. We must look at every aspect of our education system and make it work for pupils and staff.

# **Review: Beyond the Blockade**

*Beyond the Blockade: education in Cuba edited by Gawain Little, Malcolm Richards, Aretha Green and Phil Yeeles*

Reading this collection of writings drawn from NEU solidarity delegations between 2016 and 2019 I couldn't help but reminisce fondly about my own trip to Cuba as part of an education delegation with NATFHE almost 20 years ago. I was also struck by Cuba's massive contribution to freedom, justice and democracy along with its impressive on-going commitment to education and health care over what is now 60 years since the revolution.

Jointly published by the NEU and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC), *Beyond the Blockade* shows how education has been central to the development of Cuban society since the revolution in 1959 and especially the phenomenal literacy crusade in 1961. As shown in the section entitled Comparing Britain and Cuba, it is exemplary - I wish we could say the same about the UK, where more often it seems that the opposite is the case - Cuba sees education as fundamental to the development of economics and science and most importantly, humanity.

Remaining true to Che Guevara's pedagogic doctrine about "the development of consciousness":

It means something deeper than learning theories strictly from books: theory and practice implementation of theory, must always go together, cannot be separated in any way, in such a way that the development of consciousness must be closely linked to study, the study of the social and economic phenomena that direct this era, and to revolutionary action...

As well as well as the comparative section, the collection covers themes such as education and revolution; curriculum and pedagogy; education, race and decolonisation and education and democracy.

Every reader will have their own favourite part. Mine is 'Curriculum and Pedagogy', in which Phil Yeeles gives an insight into the pedagogical approach taken by Che and its impact on the

# and the blockade

prevailing education system.

Bernard Regan's historical overview is crucial for contextualising the book's themes. The section called Education, Race and Decolonisation provides a solidly multi-cultural and anti-racist backbone to the publication. The final contribution by Gawain Little, one of the editors, demonstrates the NEU's commitment to international solidarity and places it at the heart of the trade union movement's mission.

*Beyond the Blockade*, with its wide-ranging reflections on education in Cuba, makes a welcome, uplifting and refreshing read in the time of coronavirus for all those trapped in lockdown and grappling with the confinements of our own uninspiring, narrow and functional curriculum.

Ian Duckett



edited by Gawain Little, Malcolm Richards, Aretha Green and Phil Yeo  
Forewords by Kevin Courtney General Secretary National Education Union  
and Nuria María Corrales Orbel General Secretary SNTECC Cuba



## Education in Cuba: the facts

Education has been at the heart of the revolutionary process in Cuba and its educational systems are widely seen as amongst the best in the world.

Free education is a universal right up to and including higher education. Pre-Revolution, education was the privilege of the wealthy and there were few schools in rural areas.

A mass literacy campaign was initiated in 1960, designed to educate the entire population, with particular focus on the poor in rural areas who up until then had been neglected.

The Great Literacy Campaign of 1960-61 was run by almost 100,000 volunteers and saw illiteracy levels drop from 42% to 4% in under a year. Literacy rates now stand at 99.8%

More recent campaigns include Cuba's 'Yo Si Puedo' (Yes I can) teaching method has taught more than ten million people to read and write throughout the world.

### World leaders on Education

According to World Bank figures, Cuba spends more as a proportion of its GDP on education than any other country in the world. Between 2009-2013 it spent 12.9% compared to 6% in Britain and 5.4% in the US.

"Mobile teachers" are deployed to homes if children are unable to go to school.

School meals and uniforms are free for everyone. Many schools provide free morning and after-school care for working parents with no extended family.

It is free to train to become a doctor in Cuba. There are now 23 medical schools in Cuba, up from only 3 in 1959 before the Cuban Revolution

# ***Greening the Curriculum and environmentalist model***

**Ian Duckett and Joseph Cowling**

Paulo Freire famously maintained in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that we as people and social beings learn to read the world long before we read the word. The purpose of education must be to teach citizens both. Since our world is, it seems, on fire as we lurch headlong towards mass extinction and ecological collapse on an unimaginable scale, this truth was never as important as now. The scientific evidence is overwhelming and people of all generations must be educated on the facts and arguments.

The Socialist Educational Association (SEA) is committed to a bigger, braver and more rounded curriculum that is truly broad and balanced. This has been a longstanding aim of progressive educationalists bolstered by the Labour manifesto pledge to build a National Education Service (NES). If such a project is to be successful then a significant part of this wider curriculum must be green.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was a United Nations programme that encourages changes in knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to enable a more sustainable and just society for all. ESD aims to empower and equip current and future generations to meet their needs using a balanced and integrated approach to the economy. Social justice and climate justice can therefore go hand-in-hand. The Labour Party has been slower than some others to embrace this idea.

## **Green Socialism**

As Socialist Societies' and Labour affiliate groups in overlapping policy areas of the environment and education, it is the opinion of the authors that the SEA and the Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) must add our voices in declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency. Alongside this we must lobby Labour MPs within our respective Parliamentary Groups to support the Extinction Rebellion (XR) sponsored Three Demands Bill. Seeking common cause with like-minded groups that make up our Left Movement

to face the existential and universal challenge of our dying planet is something that needs to be treated with the utmost seriousness and urgency.

## **A Green New Deal**

Labour's environmentalist agenda has progressed somewhat. A key turning-point was the Party's commitment to a Green New Deal, with commitments like these:

- Commitment to zero carbon emissions by 2030;
- Rapidly phasing out all fossil fuels;
- Large-scale investment in renewables;
- A just transition to well-paid, unionised, green jobs available for all;
- A green industrial revolution expanding public, democratic ownership as far as necessary for the transformation;
- Green public integrated transport that connects all parts of the United Kingdom;
- Supporting developing countries' climate transitions by increasing transfers of finance, technology and capacity;
- Assuring everyone's basic rights through the provision of universal services;
- Welcoming climate refugees while taking measures against the displacement of peoples from their homes.

## **The role of trade unions**

The TUC continues to lobby government with regard to supporting the development of workforce skills required to support transition to a zero-carbon economy. Unionlearn is also actively engaged in promoting the role of union reps in this regard, both through negotiating strategies at the workplace level and through union engagement in Green Skills Partnerships across communities and sectors. Clearly, teacher unions like the NEU and UCU have a major role to play in this.

# The case for a sustainable

## Strategies for developing a green curriculum

Strategies for “greening” the curriculum fall into two broad categories: policy and learning. In true dialectical materialist tradition greener schools and a green learning curriculum will impact on one another and drive the agenda forward.

### Greener schools

In terms of policy there are a number of positions schools and colleges can adopt. These could include:

- Participation in International Walk to School Day (and Bike to School Day) - This can readily be integrated into the curriculum by asking your students to explore the question: “What impact does car transportation have on the local environment?”
- Start a student/pupil -run recycling club -This can involve exploring how to recycle our construction paper, catalogues, envelopes, scrap paper, and more, thanks to our recycling club.
- No detention or disciplinary measures to be taken against students who participate in the School Strike 4 Climate. Fitting lessons around planned strike days would reduce children missing out on work in class and playing catch-up.

Other ideas might be:

- Upcycle newspapers and magazines to create art projects. Workshops could be used to encourage resourcefulness – restoring old-fashioned make-do-and-mend concepts rather than today’s “throwaway culture” could do a power of good in this regard. It is a sad and telling fact that younger peoples’ attitudes have been socialised and governed by artificial product lifecycles and mass consumerism.
- Adopt an endangered animal
- Take an environmentally informative field trip.

Field trips are another great way to help your students become more environmentally conscious such as an alternative energy plant or local landfill site or recycling centre or an organic farm.

- Introduce organic composting
- Create a birdhouse habitat around the playground
- Go paperless

### A green learning curriculum

Developing a greener curriculum is a tough assignment. However, understanding what to expect and preparing ahead of time can be of great help. Here's a list of strategies for curriculum building from various teaching professionals:

- Bringing climate science and the earth sciences into the classroom and making it integral and central to the Science curriculum
- Focus on the Students – empower them: they will often know more
- Planning to Change the World
- Avoid Pre-packaged Curriculum
- Plan for Feedback and Assessments that have big learner input
- Research projects on environmental projects from Primary to HE



# **Wales: The grass is not**

**By Mairead Canavan, Vale of Glamorgan NEU branch & district secretary and national executive member for Wales**

It often seems those in England wear rose-tinted glasses when assessing the role of local authorities and schools in Wales. There is a perception that schools in Wales are always better off because they still operate within a local authority structure. While it's true we are very lucky not to have any academies - we hear lots of horror stories about the practices and terrible policies in some of the multi-academy trusts in England - we do have a growing number of foundation schools that have opted out of local authority control. And there are more layers of bureaucracy in the Welsh education system, including four regional consortia, compared with England. This complexity often causes difficulties.

The challenge of Covid-19 has been handled very differently by the 22 local authorities across Wales, which has been very frustrating and led to vast amounts of work for union representatives. A common approach from the Government would have been much more helpful.

Immediately after the Welsh Government announced that schools would close head teachers did whatever they saw fit for the most part, and that varied a lot within local authorities, as well as across Wales. Some schools had the best interests of their staff at heart, directing those with medical conditions to work from home even before schools were officially closed. Other schools couldn't make their minds up and ordered all staff into school even when there were no pupils. A minority of head teachers believed it was reasonable to have staff changing wall displays and cleaning premises instead of isolating at home like the rest of the country.

After a few weeks there was agreement between Welsh Government and local authorities that opening all schools was unsustainable in terms of numbers and that hubs were the way forward. However, there

was little agreement on how to set hubs up and the hours and ratios varied dramatically across the country.

Most worrying was the lack of consultation with unions, with some local authorities asserting that they had consulted, when their idea of consulting was to phone unions individually telling them the plans instead of discussing and deciding on a way forward.

After a long wait, at the beginning of the summer term the Welsh Government published a model policy for school hubs. Secretaries and reps across Wales say most are now operating in much the same way as this guide suggests, but this has been at the cost of many hours of my time, as both a secretary and an executive member, and the time and frustration of other secretaries across Wales.

Unfortunately, the Government hub guidance is not as strong as the NEU advice in its protection of our members who are shielding or living with vulnerable people. The Government guidance says "those who are at increased risk of severe illness from Covid-19 should be stringent in following social distancing guidelines," while the NEU says this group should be working from home.

We had many battles where we insisted on the protection of our members according to their union advice.



# always greener

Union negotiation in Wales would be much easier if we only had to deal with the Welsh Government and individual head teachers. As things stand, the local authorities, Welsh Government and consortia all try to direct head teachers. A very important part of the union rep's role during this crisis has been to empower head teachers to make their own decisions (with their school governors), despite the differing instructions from elsewhere.

For a long time it seemed that devolution was an advantage during the pandemic, especially when governments began to make decisions about schools opening more widely. When the Westminster government rushed into a reckless announcement on May 10th that English primary schools would reopen on June 1st, they faced a huge backlash and it looked as if the Welsh government was determined not to make the same mistakes. First Minister Mark Drakeford and Education Minister Kirsty Williams were both adamant that schools would only reopen when it is safe. Mr Drakeford also promised that schools would have three weeks' notice of wider opening. Even more encouraging was the fact that Mark Drakeford posted on social media several times extolling the virtues of unions and urging workers to join one.

They both stated that setting a date to reopen schools more widely was not appropriate. We began to hope that a much safer September return might be on the cards. In the 3 week review on Thursday May 28th Mark Drakeford stated that the r number in Wales was the same as it had been 3 weeks before so another period of 3 weeks would commence with a few small changes. We learned later that in fact the r number had been rounded down and there was a possibility that it could have been marginally higher than 3 weeks before.

This cautious approach however, changed very suddenly, on the very same evening, when Welsh government stated they wanted to set a date for schools to open more widely. The first suggestion made was for a return on August 3rd moving the summer holiday forward accordingly. That was quickly negated by the NEU because it would mean a structural change to teacher's terms and conditions.

A proposal was produced by Welsh government and sent to the unions to consult on with only a few days to return it. There were 2 options for the date of return – both on June 29th but one option suggested schools stay open for an extra week at the end of the summer term and that week was to be given back by adding it to the October half term. There were also 2 options for numbers of pupils to return – the first option was for year 6, 10 and 12 to return for some time before the summer as they were the classes transitioning or taking exams next year. The other option was for all pupils to have some time back at school before the end of the summer term. After consulting with members, unions mostly returned to say that the preferred options would be to keep the term dates the same and to open for years 6, 10 and 12 as the safest option.

Inexplicably Kirsty Williams made a shock announcement on Wednesday June 3rd which was the opposite of what unions had advised. She stated that schools would open on June 27th to all pupils (no more than 1/3 of pupils to be in school at any one time). In a large secondary school 1/3 can be up to 700 pupils and it means that each teacher and member of school staff will be exposed to hundreds of pupils across a period of those few weeks. Kirsty also stated that schools would stay open for an extra week until July 27th despite the fact that teachers will all have completed their 195 contracted days by then. This is a breach of teacher's terms and conditions according to the Burgundy book and it is hugely disappointing that Welsh government sent out a consultation paper but then disregarded it when they didn't like the result.

Even more disappointing is the knowledge that the chaotic return to schools in Wales could be even worse than in England where only certain year groups were sent back in primary schools but secondary schools were delayed for another 2 weeks. Welsh NEU members were shocked when Boris made his "rushed and reckless" announcement for English schools and we sent solidarity to our English colleagues. Now we are grateful that so much union work around covid-19 has been undertaken by our English counterparts which we can repurpose in our own battles ahead.

# **Responding to the crisis: Education Unions**

Throughout the Covid Crisis, the aim of the National Education Union (NEU) has been to protect education workers, the children they teach and the communities they are part of.

When the crisis first broke, the government had no intention of closing schools and colleges, and instead proposed that regular handwashing was the solution to preventing the spread through education institutions. The NEU called for schools and colleges to be closed to all but the most vulnerable children and the children of key workers. Within five days, this demand had mass support and had become government policy.

Days before schools were due to return on the Monday following the announcement, it was still not clear how 'vulnerable children' would be defined, who was on the list of key workers or, crucially, how schools would be staffed. The NEU responded by proposing a rota system for staffing schools and asking school union groups to put these rotas in place where they hadn't been agreed by management. By the end of the week, rotas had become the norm in schools.

Since then, the NEU has put forward and won policy on what homeworking should look like, which members of staff should be joining rotas and which should be working from home because they or members of their family are particularly vulnerable to the virus, and how contact should be maintained between educators and students. Essentially, in many workplaces, the union is directly involved in determining what 'normal' looks like during the crisis.

Of course, it should simply be common sense that the mass of workers in any establishment have a direct say over how it is run, but in Britain, after decades of Tory anti-union laws (never repealed by Labour governments), this is actually a huge step forward.

During this time, the NEU has received praise from other unions, the TUC and overwhelmingly from its own members for its response to the crisis. At the same time, the union has gained 9000 new members, including 1700 in a single day, following our response to the Prime Minister's most recent

announcement.

So far, our response is looking strong. I want to argue that this isn't a coincidence. We have been able to respond effectively precisely because of a number of factors that predate the crisis, products of the NEU's history, the conscious strategy of its leadership and its long-term aims. However, this also means that our response, positive as it has been so far, needs to be deepened and extended if we are to achieve the aims we have set ourselves, and that this will also involve broadening our approach and acknowledging our need to work with others in education and across the labour movement.

The first thing that has contributed to our ability to respond to this crisis is the fact that the NEU is itself very new, the product of a recent unification process between the ATL and the NUT. This has strengthened us in two ways.

Firstly, as a relatively new organisation, we do not yet have set ways of doing things – there is no 'business as usual' at the NEU. Even prior to the outbreak of Covid19, we were in a process of change and development, reflecting on the way things had been done in both legacy unions, whilst also looking to best practice outside of the union, in order to frame our approach. Since the formal date of amalgamation on 1st September 2017, and throughout the negotiations that led up to that date, we have reviewed everything about our aims as an organisation, our structure, our strategy and our tactical flexibility within that strategy. This has left us well-placed to respond to the unforeseen.

However, there is also a second effect of the recent unification process. In the process of identifying and reconceptualising our purpose, we recognised that a key role, if not the key role, of an education union is to shape the future of education. The unification process itself led us to the conclusion that our role is far wider than just the day-to-day representation of our members, collectively and individually. What many members actually seek from their union is a professional voice on educational issues and we are striving to be that voice. This has obviously been crucial in

# *A view from the*

**Gawain Little**

responding to the crisis, for example when negotiating over what homeworking looks like; an approach simply based on members rights as workers, which ignored their responsibilities, active commitment and expertise as educators, would have been insufficient.

The NEU is operating in a context defined overwhelmingly by forty years of neoliberal education policy. In their 2010 book *Industrial Relations in Education*, Carter et al (2010) outline three broad options for trade unions responding to neoliberal education reform.

The first is rapprochement, broadly defined by the union going with the direction of government policy, or at least not seeking to halt or change that direction, whilst seeking to do the best they can for their members within that overall policy shift. Essentially, this is a pragmatic approach to education unionism, or so it seems on the surface. However, as Carter et al point out, because education professionals, and their unions, are by definition a problem within a system that attempts to reduce costs (and in doing so, professional qualification and expertise), implement a narrow instrumental curriculum with standardised assessment over a narrow domain, and institute a performance-related pay and appraisal system based on measurable outcomes, rewards and sanctions, this response is fundamentally flawed. Whether unions resist or facilitate the neoliberal policy agenda, there is no role for them within that agenda and their members' rights will be steadily eroded. The best that unions which follow this approach can hope for is to manage this decline.

The second approach they term resistance. In this approach, unions seek to halt and reverse the direction of travel, using the power and resources at their disposal. This is the strategy which has been adopted by many education unions in recent years. Utilising their negotiating power at local authority and national levels, and mobilising grassroots activists for set-piece confrontations, they try to hold back, or even turn back, the tide of change. However, this approach too is flawed as the fragmentation of state education means that

some decisions have been heavily centralised, to a level where unions have been losing influence since the end of collective bargaining rights in 1987, whilst others have been devolved to a workplace level, where unions have similarly lacked influence since their negotiating structures, resources and expertise were focused at local authority level. Consequently, unions following this approach are not equipped to face the main thrusts of the attack.

The third option, renewal, involves combining resistance with an attempt to renew union structures to access and build new sources of power. A useful metaphor for this is the way in which some martial arts use an opponent's strength and power against them. The fragmentation of education, whilst damaging to the system as a whole (as revealed by the initial paralysis across the system in the current crisis) and designed, in part, to weaken traditional trade union influence concentrated at local authority level, contradictorily also provides an opportunity for education unions to grow their power. The shifting of significant decision-making in education to workplace or MAT level, makes that decision-making much more immediate to union members. It also opens up the possibility of reintroducing collective bargaining at workplace or employer level. In order to do so, unions need to recognise this opportunity and concentrate their resources on engaging the mass of their membership (not just a few highly-motivated and highly-trained activists) and on creating workplace bargaining structures.

This analysis of education union strategies was studied by its predecessor unions and it is precisely this last approach that the NEU has been seeking to put into practice. In doing so, the union has drawn on the work of John Kelly (1998) in applying social movement Mobilisation Theory to trade union organisation. This approach argues that collective organisation, mobilisation and action starts from the recognition of an injustice and that, "whilst the roots of collective interest definition lie in perceived injustice, it is crucial that workers attribute their problems to an agency

which can be held responsible”.

However, the crucial step in this theory from the point of view of the NEU is when Kelly goes on to describe the “small but critical mass of activists whose role in industrial relations has been seriously understated” – workplace leaders. According to Kelly, these activists have a key role in identifying and promoting a sense of grievance through challenging accepted inequalities, and also in creating or sustaining “a high degree of group cohesion”. These workplace leaders are the key to delivering the kind of union renewal envisaged by Carter et al and, in the process, to engaging the mass of union members, as opposed to a shallow layer of activists.

Crucially, this theory both assumes a high degree of agency for these workplace leaders – they really can and do change the outcome not just of local disputes, but of national campaigns – and recognises their explicitly political role in challenging inequality to promote collective action. For this reason, the NEU has focused significant resources on recruiting, training and supporting these leaders. The union has doubled down on this approach since lockdown, taking staff off non-essential duties and tasking them with phoning every workplace rep in the country. We have also prioritised recruitment of workplace leaders, recruiting 600 new reps during the period of the crisis so far.

These workplace leaders, of course, must operate according to a strategy and, if it is to be effective, the union’s national strategy has to be based on mobilising them to organise the wider membership. As Jane McAlevey argues in *Organising for Power* (2019), this approach to structure-based organising has to be focused and methodical, built on an analysis of the power structures involved, and on regular structure tests. These are collective actions where workplace leaders have to get members to sign up to a specific statement or activity. They are crucial to building campaigns but also offer an opportunity to measure strengths and weaknesses in workplace structures.

Examples of such structure tests are the recent letters circulated by the NEU in response to the threat of early school opening. In addition to the public petition signed by over 350,000 people, the union launched two letters committing the signatories to only return to school when their union tells them it is safe to do so. One letter is to

be sent to Local Authorities and is signed by workplace representatives. This helps local officers to test the strength of their workplace representation structures. The other is to be sent to headteachers and MAT CEOs and is signed by school and college staff. This helps workplace leaders to test the strength of their workplace organisation.

Of course, this approach to workplace organising, however important, is only part of the picture. At the same time as turning to the workplace, the NEU has redefined itself as a social movement trade union, building community alliances and seeking to speak on behalf of the interests of students, parents and the wider community. This explicit recognition of the wider remit of the union, and of its duty to tackle social justice issues, such as poverty, racism and inequality, has again been significant during the crisis. On questions such as welfare calls to students isolating at home, and the digital divide between those with access to online resources and those without, a social-justice compass, rooted in direct contact with the communities we are working with, has been essential.

Equally essential has been the openly political approach adopted by the NEU since its creation. This is not a party-political approach, and indeed the NEU is committed to party-political independence, but an open commitment to use political means to achieve our aims where necessary. During the crisis, this has meant that we have not shied away from the politics of the situation; we are not bystanders in the political process but active participants, motivated by the interests of our members, the children they teach and the communities they live in.

This political engagement also has a pedagogical expression. The first aim of the NEU, as set out in its rulebook is to “promote the power of education as a critical and creative process which enables learners to understand and contribute to wider society and the world in which they live and to change it for the better”. Whilst fighting to protect educators, students and communities during lockdown, the NEU has also been building support for an alternative future for education. This has been an explicit part of the work of the union at a national level and has also been taken up by educator-activists within the union.

The Celebrating Education project, organised by classroom educators to share educational

approaches, expertise and the voices of educators, has so far held two successful online meetings during lockdown, with over 2,000 educators participating in the calls and more than 10,000 watching online. This is a reflection both of the deep dissatisfaction of educators with the current education system, but also of their motivation and commitment to bring about change to that system. The NEU will be instrumental in mobilising around this commitment to change.

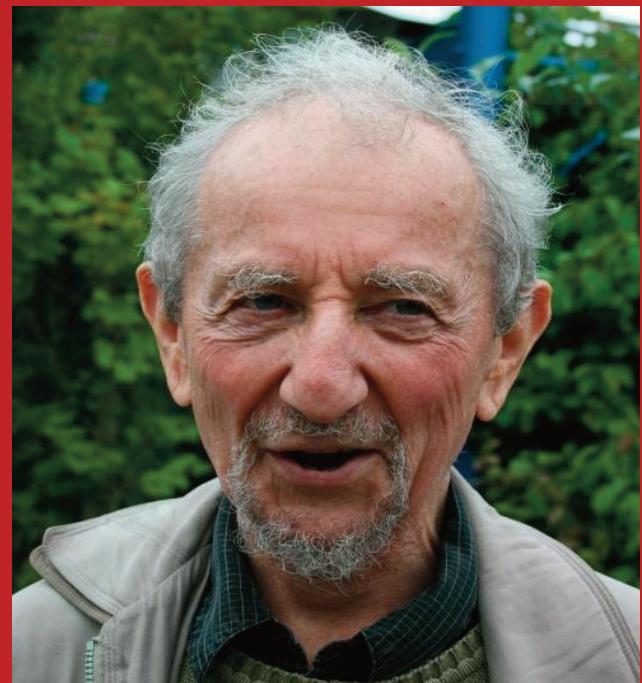
Taken together, the factors above constitute a coherent political and strategic direction, one that is open to continued reflection and development but which guides the work of our union now and into the future.

As I am currently writing, the government has just announced proposals to partially open schools, potentially with a significant risk to life. The next few days, weeks and months will be crucial for educators, for families and for society as a whole. The response of the National Education Union will be based, as can be seen above, on the strategic direction adopted prior to lockdown and on the tactical flexibility of its activists within this strategic direction.

What is abundantly clear from this approach is that responding, both to this current crisis and to the more long-term crisis within our education system, will involve organising and mobilising the mass of educators who are dissatisfied with the system, but also building strong alliances with parents, communities and all those who care about the future of education.



# Obituaries



**Professor Harvey Goldstein ( 1939-2020)**

Our friend, colleague and life-long socialist Harvey Goldstein died in April aged 80 of the corona virus. He once gave himself a 40% chance of living to 90, but was no great believer in targets, especially if not supported by a rational presentation of evidence. Harvey was born in East London, went to Hendon Grammar school, and took a degree in pure maths and statistics at Manchester University. Moving back to London, his first job was at the Institute for Child Health, then he moved to the National Children's Bureau and in 1977 to the Institute for Education where he taught, wrote and researched until 2005. He co-founded a Centre for Multilevel Modelling, which moved to Bristol University in that year, but where he carried on working for the next 15 years together with other visiting Professorships. His work covered an incredibly wide range in the social, educational and medical sciences, and he produced some 360 scientific papers, from early studies of child obesity and smoking in pregnancy to his final paper published in the Royal Statistical Society Journal two months before he died, on "The role of evidence in public policy making.". It was his mission to

persuade politicians and educate the public on the uses and abuses of statistical evidence in producing public policy. Indeed it was his interest in early studies of school effectiveness and school assessment, and the abuse of research in these areas that led to his interest in multilevel modelling, although probably not many politicians read his seminal book on Multilevel Statistical methods. He cheered me up in 1992 when, after I suggested in a newspaper article that the crude league tables the government first published said more about social class than schools, I received a death threat (written in green ink, - this was before social media). I later wondered if it came from a 'public' school educated person!

It was interesting that just before he died one of his young colleagues at the Centre gave a talk showing that despite the government's much-hyped claims that Progress 8 scores which supposedly measure the average academic value each school adds to pupil learning, still have it wrong. The measures still do not fully take account of socio-economic status and ethnicity, the most advantaged pupils still show higher progress, and the wrong schools get rewarded or punished. As Harvey wrote in his role of evidence paper, " I have spent much of my career arguing about school league tables. Over the last thirty years, some of us have had some success in conveying notions of statistical uncertainty... and the need to make adjustments to the differences in pupil intakes between schools. but they have done little to moderate the enthusiasm of the media who are generally unwilling to forsake the idea that what matters is a simple ranking of the 'best' and 'worst' schools without ..the need for statistical adjustment of intake". He noted that Michal Gove, boasting in 2019 that as a result of his actions as Education Secretary 2 million more children were in 'good' school in 2019 also had it wrong. Gove failed to note the rising pupil numbers and only inspection of 'problem' schools that made this boast untenable. Harvey also criticised the way government policies – irrespective of parties - encouraged schools and universities to game the systems, either in school exclusion of pupils or the university Research Assessment Exercise where academics push the' impact' of their research.

Harvey was a kind and patient man, and his collaboration over the years with many colleagues demonstrated that some of the best work in academia is done through sharing ideas, and

showing how collective efforts and meticulous attention to truth are the best methods of intellectual advance. The problem, as he well knew, was to get politicians to understand this.

### **Sally Tomlinson**

Emeritus Professor Goldsmith, London University  
Honorary Fellow, Department of Education,  
University of Oxford

### **Elizabeth Osmon: stalwart of Haringey SEA.**



Elizabeth was already a long-standing member of the Labour Party when she moved into Hornsey in 1977 and quickly became a member of the Haringey branch of the SEA. Her father was a toolmaker and she was born in Birmingham in June 1930 as Elizabeth Beryl Sparrow. She won a scholarship to the prestigious King Edwards High School for Girls and then to Cambridge to study Mathematics. She later took a degree at Birkbeck College in Psychology and along with other left-wing psychologists became theoretically opposed to the 11+ and a committed supporter of comprehensive education.

Elizabeth had worked as a lecturer before moving but had four sons and became their sole carer when she moved to Hornsey, so was not able to work again until later, when she became a lecturer at Middlesex University in Research Methods. Meanwhile Hornsey Labour Party took advantage of such free time as she had available.

Haringey Council had already restructured its secondary schools into comprehensive schools in 1967 and in 1983 it merged two of them into a larger school, Fortismere School, and appointed Elizabeth as Chair of the Board of Governors. She served in this role for many years, alternating with Richard Lowe as Chair and Vice Chair.

Although the New Labour Government increased spending on education, it decided to use PFI to supplement state funds and in 1999 Haringey decided to make use of it for Fortismere School. Elizabeth, Richard and the other two Labour Governors (Max Morris and Brian Simon) were opposed to using PFI funding and argued that it would burden the School with heavier costs in the long term. Regrettably Haringey Council responded to their stand by replacing the existing four Governors so that the policy could be forced through. Richard says, "If we were to be sacked we felt it was a worthwhile issue on which to go and none of us changed our minds subsequently".

Although no longer a Governor Elizabeth continued supporting the School and sent 3 of her sons there. She was a member of her ward, Alexandra Park, and supported other movements such as racial equality. Our Hornsey MP Catherine West recalls that she first met Liz at a meeting for Refugee Resettlement at the Race Equality Office in Turnpike Lane in the 1990s.

Despite their disagreement with the Council Leadership over PFI, Haringey SEA maintained cooperative relationships with our two Constituency Labour Parties and the Council until George Meeham ceased to be Leader in 2006. At this time the Council supported a proposition to turn Fortismere into a Foundation School, despite the fact that the majority of the staff and parents were opposed. Elisabeth was foremost among those who tried to prevent it going ahead.

Although Labour Party membership shrank in this period, the membership of Haringey SEA grew as we became the voice of opposition to the new Council Leader's open support of Academies. Although our efforts were not immediately successful, Education policy was a factor in the change of the leadership of the Council after the 2018 Council Elections. Seven members of the Haringey SEA are now Councillors, including the Deputy Leader and the Labour Group Leader is Sarah Williams who was on the NEC for a while.

Elizabeth was very much part of our team and always had a contribution to make at our meetings.

Richard Lowe's recent appreciation of her speaks for us all: "Liz was a very good friend of mine going back many years. I was her vice chair at Fortismere and she in turn was my vice chair when I was chair. I think we made a good team. I respected her intellectual thoroughness and determination that policy should be driven by evidence. But most of all I will remember her sense of humour, warmth, kindness and tolerance".

**Margaret Morris 25 April 2020**



