

RECLAIMING EDUCATION



CASE

Comprehensive Future

FORUM

newvisions
for education group



A NATIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE: WHAT SHOULD IT MEAN?

1. Introduction

- a) Labour's 2017 General Election Manifesto promised a National Education Service that would give people confidence and hope by making education a right, not a privilege. This document shows how this might be achieved.
- b) Like the National Health Service, which guarantees every citizen medical care, the NES would be a promise on behalf of the whole community that everyone would be offered fully inclusive education according to their needs.
- c) This need not be achieved through a centralised bureaucracy. Just as the NHS's pledge is provided, in practice, by a wide range of institutions such as GP surgeries, hospitals and clinics, the NES's services could be offered through early years settings, schools, colleges, universities and adult educators such as the Workers Educational Association.
- d) In the same way that the Department of Health, while retaining overall responsibility, delegates complex tasks such as the safety and suitability of treatments or the training of staff to expert bodies, **the Department of Education would need to delegate supporting services appropriately.**
- e) Our tradition provides for these services and strategic responsibilities to be **devolved to local, directly elected bodies**, though they could be grouped together where this is demonstrably more effective and efficient.
- f) Some new or redefined national organisations would be needed to monitor and sustain curriculum and staff development as well as monitor quality. There is a clear need to provide assurance to taxpayers that the resources they provide are well-used, without government ministers being involved in the details.
- g) The role of private companies such as Multi-Academy Trusts should be phased-out in favour of publicly-run institutions.

2. Key entitlements

- a) An important feature of the NES would be to define key entitlements which would be free at the point of use. These would include:
 - i) the availability and extent of Early Years' education;
 - ii) the range of subjects offered to children and young people in full-time education;
 - iii) inclusivity for all children and young people, with guaranteed access to all necessary support for learning;
 - iv) an entitlement to lifelong learning

- b) Consideration should also be given to education for prisoners, retraining for those made redundant and other areas where education can be transformative in the context of lifelong learning.

3. **A universal but locally responsive service**

- a) A National Education Service would not only play an important part in rebuilding our economy and culture, **but also be responsive to local needs** - in contrast with the remote bureaucracies that now dominate education.
- b) The focus of education should be collaboration rather than competition.

4. **Not another bureaucratic empire**

- a) There is a danger that a National Education Service may be seen as simply another bureaucratic empire. Commentators have already noted that successive Secretaries of State for Education have taken extraordinary – and excessive – powers.
- b) Ministers would steer work that is critical to the welfare and strategic interests of the nation.
- c) This tension could best be resolved by ensuring that the laws enacted to create the NES are framed in a way that clearly defines duties and powers, distributes them more widely than at present and ensures that citizens have rights of consultation and redress.

5. **Maintaining and improving quality**

- a) There would continue to be **a national inspectorate on the model of HMI** which is able to assess and comment directly upon the quality of teaching and learning, but most of its work

would be to ensure there is an effective, locally-delivered plan for school improvement.

- b) Where appropriate, **smaller local authorities would be encouraged to group together** to provide a “critical mass” able to sustain a range of respected, effective and efficient support services while retaining a clear line of accountability to elected members.
- c) The role of monitoring and improving schools, Early Years settings and colleges is a key one **and requires a service that is both critical and supportive** in contrast with the punitive style of current arrangements. Recognising that the challenges would differ between areas, there must be wide consultation on how best to achieve this.
- d) The burden of testing, which currently leads to excessive workloads and ‘teaching to the test’ would be reduced.
- e) **School improvement cannot be driven by order but requires highly professional and well supported staff.**
- f) It is the responsibility of national government to ensure that sufficient teachers and support staff are recruited and trained at all times, taking account of the need to counter natural wastage, provide for specialisms and develop leaders. Consideration should be given to creating a national body which discharges these responsibilities but which is accountable locally, possibly through a regionally representative board.
- g) Some oversight functions may properly rest at regional – rather than borough or county – level.

The current arrangement of Regional Schools Commissioners is not efficient, effective or accountable and there should be wide consultation on its replacement.

6. Local accountability

- a) There must be an early dialogue with locally elected representatives as to the most effective, efficient and responsive structures for the various functions of the service. Structures based on existing local authorities to support the day-to-day running of schools would be retained and renewed.
- b) Schools must be directly accountable to their own governing body, consisting of representatives of parents, staff and the local community and they should be actively supported at local authority level.
- c) There would need to be a review of how funds are distributed to meet local need in order to provide high quality education in all areas, urban and rural.

7. Championing the needs of children, young people and their parents

- a) Schools deal best with the needs of those pupils known to them. The National Education Service would provide an overarching framework for a lifelong education system designed to meet the needs of the nation.
- b) The needs of those children and young people who are not in schools (or are poorly served by them) must be championed at a higher level and in a way that is responsive to local parents.

c) Services that provide fair admissions, impartial careers advice and school transport must focus on the needs of all young people, offering

additional learning support to those that need it, including those young people with SEN.

- d) Local Authorities are best placed to host these services and they should be funded directly and adequately to discharge these duties.

8. Early Years Provision

- a) Sufficient affordable, high quality Early Years' places must be made available locally.

9. Negative impact of Selection at age 11

- a) Academic selection at age eleven is a particular concern, because it leads to inadequate provision for all and channels resources unfairly. **Selection would be phased out in favour of universal high-quality comprehensive education.**

10. Year 12 onwards

- a) The current system often caters poorly for those 16-18 year-olds who do not continue to follow a traditional academic curriculum in their own school's sixth form. Emphasis should now be placed on educational attainment at age 18, rather than 16, as this is the gateway to continuing education and learning.
- b) Local Authorities, acting individually and collectively, must ensure that schools and colleges work together to provide an accessible, broad and balanced curriculum for all young people in their area and empower and fund them to make this a reality.
- c) The role of Further Education Colleges in providing both a greater range of subjects and alternative provision is a key one and **funding levels must reflect the importance of their work.**

11. The Curriculum

a) **There is a clear need for continuity and consistency.** It is unfair on students and their teachers to experience repeated and unhelpful change in this area, which is one that has suffered from too much of the wrong sort of Ministerial intervention.

b) Curriculum development should be based on evidence, guided by professional experience and introduced after systematic consultation.

c) However, there would continue to be a requirement for change to meet society's developing needs. Arrangements must be created for devising and revising curricula which is led by professional educators and is calibrated to enable all pupils to learn appropriately.

Following wide consultation on the precise form this would take, **legislation must be enacted to provide a stable basis for years to come.**

12. Fairness and a sense of urgency

a) **The role of the Government should be that of strategic funder rather than day-to-day manager.**

However, where standards have grown inconsistent and services have atrophied, Government should press ahead with reform while ensuring that children and young people do not experience a "disruption of service" which would cause continuing disadvantage and move swiftly to address poor standards or inefficient and unfair use of public funds.

b) Government should ensure that, where young people have been disadvantaged by earlier, ill-considered initiatives, they are not left adrift with outdated or worthless qualifications.

The commitment to lifelong learning is an important means of redressing those injustices.

c) Low attainment is connected to wider social and economic issues and education needs to be part of a broader regeneration strategy.

d) In conclusion, these proposals will not be achieved overnight and young people, their parents, educators and politicians all need to see it as a vital task that would benefit the whole nation.

WHO ARE WE?

Reclaiming Education is supported by:

- Alliance for Inclusive Education
- Campaign for State Education
- Comprehensive Future
- Forum (3-19 Comprehensive Education magazine)
- Information for School and College Governors
- New Visions Group
- Socialist Educational Association

- in conjunction with other campaigning groups and trade unions.

More information can be found at www.reclaimingeducation.org.uk