

A VISION FOR EDUCATION

Education is the passing on of knowledge, skills and culture to bring about a better society. It is generated from the productive processes, which in themselves produce higher order skills and understanding. In short it relies on the industrial and cultural capital of workers.

Education provides the intellectual strength and dignity of the working class. Knowledge gives us power. Workers must be skilled at both a general and specific level so we are self-reliant as a country and not dependent on workers from elsewhere. Society needs thinkers who capable of linking theory and practice, with a capacity to analyse and criticise complex ideas.

While the point of education is not just a service to the individual, it is important that workers feel they are able to progress their skills and knowledge throughout their lives, both for the good of society and for their own well-being. Informal education is part of this process, whether it is through play services, youth work, community development, adult or trade union education. The socialist state will guarantee the provision of life-long learning opportunities.

The crucial link between educational achievement and poverty must be addressed, and will require investment in health, housing, and all the services needed to improve the lives of workers. This above all will raise the educational attainment of the whole country. We must treat education is an investment, and it must be free at the point of delivery.

Private education will be abolished and its resources brought under state control. We all have aptitudes and intelligence, and education will cease to be a commodity to be bought and sold.

Education cannot flourish if the economic life of the nation is in decline. As a planned approach is taken to the economy, so all educational provision will need to deliver the knowledge and skills required to regenerate the national economy and raise the cultural capital of workers. There will need to be an integrated approach which reaches down through all levels of education.

Schools, colleges, universities, trade unions, economic development committees and local industries will need to plan on a regional basis to serve local needs and provide apprenticeships and work experience.

current attacks on education

The education system from the nursery to tertiary and community sectors have never been free from the influence of government. Its organisation, structure, curriculum and staffing have been at their mercy since the first state provision in the 19th century when educating the working class was seen as a dangerous thing to do.

In recent years all sectors have been subject to attempts to break up and privatise the service. The wages and conditions of staff are under constant attack, as government attempts to weaken the education unions and control the professional input of teaching staff. The curriculum is chopped and changed according to political whim, and imposed through a target setting culture which fulfils neither the needs of students or the country at large.

Teachers in all sectors need to reassert their professional control over their work. The research is already there to provide best practice; the unions have already produced excellent briefing papers on how their sectors should be run. All that is required is the confidence to insist on an education agenda for the working class.

schools

All schools will be comprehensive and secular. Academies, Free Schools, Foundation schools, trusts, specialist and faith schools will revert to comprehensive schools within the state system. There will be no involvement of religions, sponsors or private businesses in schools and they will be encouraged to co-operate and not to compete.

The aim will be for all schools to be good schools, which may mean special funding mechanisms and support systems for schools currently in areas of social deprivation. The question of choice will not be necessary, as the aim will be for all schools to become good ones. Local Education Authorities will be strengthened to provide a key role in planning provision and providing centralised services. They will identify what needs to be done to raise achievement, in conjunction with other services which work to alleviate deprivation. Schools outside Local Authority control and in the hands of PFI companies will be returned.

There will be an integrated, well-resourced nursery education sector available to all children and staffed by fully qualified professionals. School students will follow a balanced National Curriculum up to the age of 16. The curriculum will be formulated by educational professionals, including teachers, lecturers in education and researchers, who will base it firmly on best practice. Children with special needs will be provided for by a mixture of properly funded support in mainstream schooling, or in specialist schools or units attached to schools.

Teachers will be the key professionals in education and valued for their role. Their experience will be crucial in directing the future of education in the country. As professionals, teachers will determine the best ways of delivering, monitoring and assessing the quality of education. The current regime of constant testing will be replaced with internal assessment of students' progress according to best practice.

LEAs will provide supportive monitoring procedures to ensure consistency. Inspections will no longer be punitive but will identify strengths and weaknesses and provide strategies and support for improvement. Teachers will take more control of the knowledge base to be delivered. They will also work closely with training institutions to ensure consistency and continuity of delivery.

Schools should be fully embedded in their communities, providing facilities for community use and encouraging wider participation in educational and cultural activities in a locality. Parents should be aware that they have both rights and responsibilities in their relationship with their children's schools.

further education

The Further Education sector has never been developed in a coherent and structured way by any government and the latest Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill does nothing to improve the situation. FE has been chronically underfunded for years.

In recent years the sector has been under attack on various fronts. It is in danger of being broken up. Adult education, for example, has been decimated. The privatisation and marketisation of FE is continuing to develop faster than ever: the level of private investment in tertiary education is far greater in the UK than the EU and OECD. Employers are increasingly expected to fund training.

Staff in the sector do not have parity of pay and conditions with the rest of the education sector. Their jobs are increasingly casualised and both staff and students suffer as classes sizes grow. There is a huge emphasis on skills, targets and accreditation with a subsequent narrowing of the curriculum and a collapse in all adult education provision which does not lead to 'proper' qualifications.

FE is enormously important both to individuals and to the country as a whole, with a high proportion of university students coming from colleges. Employers recruit students who have been trained in vocational skills. Adults can boost their qualifications, retrain or enjoy learning in their retirement.

To develop the FE sector it must first be brought under democratic control. FE colleges should come back under Local Authority and regional bodies to assist with planning and accountability. There should be forums which include teacher,

students, employers, unions and community organisations to map out the direction and provision of FE in the locality. Funding for students should match that of schools.

The sector needs a stable, permanent and well rewarded staff. All staff, including for example those working with adults or in prisons, need pay parity with other sectors, a national pay structure and secure tenure. FE colleges need a highly trained workforce, and the sector should provide and encourage staff development and opportunities to become involved in research.

There should be a right to learning in the workplace with everyone entitled to access to basic skills, and level three qualifications, regardless of age. Workplace education committees, with trade union representation will protect staff. The Government must fund high quality apprenticeship schemes.

There should be lifelong learning opportunities for all, including courses for personal well being, cultural development and enjoyment.

higher education

Higher education is an investment in the academic and cultural knowledge of the nation, and a source of great satisfaction and opportunity for the individual.

Higher education will cease to be the preserve of the wealthy or for those prepared to carry a vast financial burden into their working lives. Payment of university fees will be abolished and grants for living expenses restored. This will ensure all forms of higher education are available to all, based simply on a student's ability.

Cuts made in research funding and especially in science, mathematics and technology courses will need to be reversed to help rebuild manufacturing. The current Research Excellence Framework (REF) promotes research designed to meet narrow, short-term targets and creates a market in academic knowledge. Research papers designed or written for REF purposes can often be excessively narrow and almost irrelevant to developing greater knowledge in a field. Research will become a cooperative exercise with funding councils led and directed by the best academics. This approach will encourage fundamental research, that may not be fully understood or yield practical results for a very long time, alongside direct research of immediate benefit to Britain's economic and cultural development.

Students will be expected to take an active part in all aspects of university life. Their current passive role, where they are often seen as a customer to be pandered to, will cease. Students will not be able to evaluate a course with a few ticks and crosses, like an opinion poll. Instead they will be expected to be part of a planning and feedback process designed to develop and sustain high quality higher education.

With the freedom to be educated to the highest levels of potential will go responsibilities. Skills should not be freely acquired in Britain, paid for by the working class, and then sold to the highest bidder elsewhere. Workers abandoning Britain will be expected to pay for the skills and knowledge they have.

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