



Education

Consultation Paper 130

Spring Conference 2017

Background

This consultation paper is presented as the first stage in the development of new Party policy in relation to education. It does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; based on the response generated and on the deliberations of the working group a full education policy paper will be drawn up and presented to Conference for debate.

The paper has been drawn up by a working group appointed by the Federal Policy Committee and chaired by Lucy Nethsingha. Members of the group are prepared to speak on the paper to outside bodies and to discussion meetings organised within the Party.

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Comments should reach us as soon as possible and no later than Friday 31st March 2017.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of education

1.1.1 The Liberal Democrats believe that our education system should empower students with the knowledge, academic credentials and skills to succeed in life, be happy and healthy, and contribute to a prosperous economy. We believe that teaching good citizenship and open-mindedness are equally important.

1.1.2 We believe in a degree of freedom from conformity in education; this entails access to a broad, rounded and relevant curriculum, as well as an appropriate amount of choice around the course a student takes.

1.1.3 We believe that our school leavers should be prepared for work and enterprise. They should be internationally competitive in a globalised world.

1.2 Challenges facing our education system

1.2.1 Our education system faces significant challenges. The sector is undergoing severe recruitment and retention issues – a crisis is clearly impending. School budgets are being squeezed more than ever before in recent times. Profound inequalities permeate our education system; it is wrong that the key determinant of a child's educational success is the wealth of his or her parents.

1.3 The importance of consistency in education

1.3.1 Education policy, from national organisation all the way to pedagogical best practice, is far too inconsistent year-on-year. In recent times, each new political cycle has seen dramatic policy shifts, putting tremendous strain on schools, teachers and system leaders.

1.3.2 It is important that all new education policy is thoroughly 'future-proofed' in order to encourage greater stability in the sector. More effort is needed to engage with the profession, to get buy-in for new policy and to adopt sensible timescales for implementation.

Question 1: Is this statement of the purpose of education correct?

2. Closing the Attainment Gap

2.0.1 Research shows us that our society and our education system are not yet able to empower all children to be on the same level-playing field; we see attainment gaps associated with wealth, ethnicity and gender. In terms of magnitude, by far the most pronounced of these gaps is that driven by parental wealth; in the UK, the correlation between low parental wealth and poor attainment is greater than in almost all other developed countries. We know that the attainment gap associated with parental wealth increases throughout a child's education; this gap is therefore at its most pronounced as students are about to enter the jobs market.

2.0.2 Attainment strongly determines life and job prospects. Too many influential jobs and positions in our society are available mainly to those from wealthier backgrounds. As well as being morally unacceptable, these gaps harm our economy. The Sutton Trust estimates that by 2050 poor social mobility will cost the UK economy up to £140 billion per year.

2.0.3 The Pupil Premium, introduced under the Coalition, allocates additional funds to schools in England according to the number of disadvantaged pupils (defined as those qualifying for free school meals) on their register. Overall, Government figures have shown that, in recent years, this attainment gap has decreased to some extent in primary schools, and to a lesser degree in secondary schools. Recent analysis conducted by the Department for Education shows that schools using Pupil Premium funding to best effect have *significantly* reduced this gap. Whilst there is an obvious case for the protection of Pupil Premium funding, there is currently uncertainty over how the Government will allocate funds following changes made to the welfare system with the introduction of Universal Credit.

2.0.4 Wide variations in performance, in terms of gap-narrowing, exist amongst schools and school systems which serve similar

students. **This indicates strongly that attainment gaps can be narrowed, and strengthens our obligation to work towards a more level playing field.** Over recent years, the evidence base informing us of 'what works' has grown significantly; data and analyses are becoming increasingly available and we can be more confident about the impact of different interventions.

2.0.5 Aside from the attainment gap driven by wealth, ethnicity and gender also influence attainment. The relationship between ethnicity and academic attainment is complicated, but some specific groups, such as White British and Afro-Caribbean pupils who are eligible for free school meals, consistently show lower attainment. Recent research by LKMco tells us that even those who attain well are often under-performing in Higher Education and the jobs market.

2.0.6 Whilst it is clear that interventions can have a positive influence on attainment gaps, other factors are at play; poor diet and nutrition, poor local economy, job prospects and expectations, poor housing and high variation in the effectiveness of parenting are no doubt major contributors to these inequalities.

*Question 2: To what extent is there a trade-off between raising overall attainment levels and reducing gaps?
Where should our priorities lie?*

Question 3: As we become more confident of 'what works' in terms of intervention, should we consider reducing schools' autonomy in how Pupil Premium money is spent?

3. Mental Health and Education

3.0.1 Mental health issues in the UK represent the largest single cause of disability, significantly increase the risk of early death, and cost the economy over £100 billion per year.

3.0.2 Data on the mental health issues of young people in the UK paint a troubling picture. According to recent government statistics, approximately ten percent of young people (aged five to sixteen) have a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder, with an additional fourteen percent suffering from a less severe problem.

3.0.3 Shockingly, suicide remains the leading cause of death amongst young people.

3.0.4 Poor mental health in young people contributes to a wide variety of individual and societal problems. Increased risk of alcohol and drug abuse, criminality, and teenage pregnancy is associated with mental health problems during childhood and early adulthood. These increased risks are not only unacceptable on principle, but also represent significant cost to families, communities, the economy and the taxpayer.

3.0.5 Engagement of mental health services with individual schools has been flagged as a concern in the 2016 report of the Commission on Children and Young People's Mental Health. Traditionally, Local Authorities (LAs) are responsible for engaging with individual schools; with the rise of multi-academy trusts (MATs), services have fragmented and access has become blurred. School organisational boundaries rarely match NHS boundaries; as such schools may need to interact with several different services, depending on where their students live. Schools may lack the human resources to provide adequate support in this area. The same report attributes high staff workload to a lack of access to relevant professional development. It is also likely that high workload

decreases the instance of teachers making referrals when they have a concern.

Question 4: Mental health services traditionally engage with schools via a Local Authority. How can we ensure these services can engage with schools falling outside of LA control, such as academies?

Question 5: Should Ofsted prioritise school mental health provisions?

4. The Crisis in Teacher Recruitment

4.1 The current recruitment crisis

4.1.1 A growing evidence base supports the notion of an impending crisis in teacher recruitment and retention. Rising pupil numbers, estimated by the DfE to increase by one million within the next decade, are increasing the demand for teachers. Teacher recruitment numbers are decreasing. The problem is particularly pronounced at secondary; Initial Teacher Training (ITT) data show that the recruitment target for 2015/2016 was missed by 11%, representing 2000 unfilled places. The majority of secondary subjects are under-recruited, particularly in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

4.1.2 A knock-on of poor ITT recruitment is that school leaders are experiencing difficulty in recruiting teachers; the Annual School Workforce Census suggests a twofold increase in full-time classroom teacher vacancies in the last five years. Growing recruitment difficulty is resulting in an increase in pupils being taught by non-specialists.

4.1.3 Applications are handled on a rolling basis, and when individual subject quotas (set by the National College) are met, further recruitment closes. Concerns have been raised regarding a likely slip in standards and quality of new recruits owing to this approach.

4.1.4 Schools in deprived and rural areas are facing particularly pronounced recruitment challenges. Schools just outside the areas of London-weighted, higher pay, lose candidates to schools within.

4.1.5 In May 2016 the DfE received heavy criticism from the Public Accounts Committee for its approach to recruitment and retention, as well as the Department's weak response to impending

crisis. The Committee accused the Department of having 'no plan' for how to achieve ITT targets. The Department was accused of not understanding the current crisis. This cannot be acceptable.

4.1.6 Over the past few years the DfE has attempted to boost recruitment with several schemes, including additional ITT routes and bursary programmes. These approaches have had mixed success. The Committee attributed poor ITT uptake in part to the complexity of entry routes: *'The myriad routes into teaching are confusing for applicants and it is the Department's responsibility to end this confusion'*.

4.1.7 Teacher attrition rates continue to rise, and are particularly high in secondary and special education. Data suggest that a decreasing ratio of leavers are retirees; this indicates growing dissatisfaction with the workforce, an assumption which is supported by workforce surveys.

4.2 Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers

4.2.1 A wealth of evidence demonstrates that good teaching is the most important in-school factor for great pupil outcomes. We know that the more a child is struggling, the more impact that a teacher can have. In order to improve our schools, teachers need time, space and support to develop.

4.2.2 Research shows us that better on-the-job learning for our teachers and teaching assistants - Continuing Professional Development, or CPD, is a key determinant of quality teaching. When done well, this improves outcomes for pupils, morale for teachers and helps attract and keep hard-working professionals in the system. Approximately £250 million is spent on CPD in schools each year; it's crucial that we reap maximum impact from this spending.

4.2.3 In government, the Liberal Democrats helped to launch Chartered College of Teaching and establish a new Standard for Teachers' Professional Development.

4.2.4 England has one of the least experienced teaching workforces of any country in the OECD. Teachers in England have four days of development per year; the international average is ten days.

Question 6: How can we ensure that the best teachers are more likely to work in deprived areas and regions?

Question 7: How do we ensure that teachers in high-cost areas are appropriately remunerated, whilst avoiding a talent gap elsewhere?

Question 8: How can we give people the option of progressing their career whilst staying at the 'chalkface'? Do we have the right career structure for teachers?

Question 9: What more needs to be done to ensure that teachers have access to more high quality CPD along with sufficient time to engage in it?

5. Funding

5.0.1 There is significant variation in per-pupil school funding between schools in England. Funding is currently allocated to schools in two stages. In the first stage, funds are passed to Local Authorities in the form of 'Dedicated School Grants' (DSGs). In the second stage, Local Authorities then utilise 'local funding formulas' to distribute funds between schools under their influence. These formulae vary widely, creating great disparity. Critics see this as being unfair.

5.0.2 Schools in England are experiencing cost pressures which are unprecedented in recent times. Planned government cuts to education spending include £600 million in cuts to a key government funding pot, as well as protection of per pupil funding *in cash terms only*. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates that cuts including these will result in a 7 – 8% real terms reduction in per-pupil spending over the next four years. **This represents an unprecedented financial pressure.**

5.0.3 Within this context of uncertainty and significant reduction in per-pupil spending, the Government has proposed a new 'national funding formula' which aims to reduce unfair disparities in school funding. Broadly, the new formula will take into account:

- A per-pupil cost factor;
- Additional funding according to low prior attainment, deprivation and number of pupils with English as an Additional Language;
- School costs factors according to fixed costs;
- Sparsity (rurality) factors;
- Geographic cost factors, namely the cost of labour.

5.0.4 Importantly, funding will no longer be administered via the Local Authority.

5.0.5 Despite a proposed cap to school losses (as well as gains), it is inevitable that some schools will lose a significant amount of funding. The phasing of the new formula will take place over just two years; giving schools little opportunity to adapt to losses.

5.0.6 There is currently great uncertainty around the future of the Pupil Premium. Whilst the Government has committed to protecting the Pupil Premium in cash terms, the amount of Pupil Premium money that schools will receive may change according to shifting pupil eligibility criteria with the roll out of Universal Credit (UC). The Government has yet to clarify new Pupil Premium eligibility criteria. This has created considerable uncertainty; particularly for schools with a high proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals, and thus a high Pupil Premium allocation. In any case, it is crucial that families eligible for free school meals are aware of their eligibility, and are encouraged to apply.

5.0.7 Whilst the government has proposed some measures to protect 'high-need' funding, several commentators have suggested that these are insufficient. Some have criticised the proposed bypassing of Local Authorities in the administering of funding, suggesting that this direct-to-school funding fails to take advantage of expertise and local knowledge.

5.0.8 Schools in rural areas face specific challenges. Most notably, small pupil numbers contribute to a lack of funding (in comparison to their urban counterparts), and a difficulty in recruiting teaching staff. The Government has moved to protect rural schools; namely via the new funding formula, which will help redistribute funds towards such schools. Critics argue that these interventions are inadequate and, in order to close the large gap between urban and rural schools more substantial and direct intervention, including monetary, is required.

5.0.9 Closure of rural schools has profound consequences to local communities. In many rural communities, the population is declining. This, combined with tough economic conditions, increases

the likelihood of businesses becoming inviable. A school can act as a 'hub' in a local community; providing not only a vital public service, but also a 'pull factor' for young families and businesses. Closure of remote schools increases commuting distance for local pupils. Councils are obliged to cover the cost of pupil commutes over a certain distance; as such, closures not only seriously inconvenience parents, but also present a significant cost.

Question 10: Given significant real-term spending cuts and resultant pressures on schools, how can schools save money? Is there 'fat to trim' in school spending?

Question 11: Given the changes to our welfare system (the move to Universal Credit), what should be the qualifying criteria for free school meals?

6. The Middle Tier

6.0.1 The introduction of academies in the late 1990s, and the subsequent trend towards academisation of schools, has contributed to a complicated schools landscape in England.

6.0.2 Academies are schools in England that are funded directly by the DfE and operate independently of the LA. The first wave of academies, established by the Labour Government in the late 1990s, replaced failing schools under the control of an LA. Throughout the remainder of the last Labour Government, and into the Coalition, the trend towards academisation continued. The number of academies has increased rapidly over the last few years; to date, only 35% of secondary schools remain under LA control.

6.0.3 Despite the Government U-turn on forced academisation, the trend towards mass academisation appears to be continuing. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 brings additional powers of intervention against underperforming schools, including the power to remove a school from the control of the LA and force it to become an academy. These powers will lie in the hands of Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs).

6.0.4 In 2014 The Government appointed eight Regional School Commissioners (RSCs). RSCs are accountable to a National Schools Commissioner, and act on behalf of the Secretary of State. They are advised by a board of head teachers (Head Teacher Boards, HTBs), members of which are appointed or elected. They are responsible for taking action where schools, or their sponsors, are failing; such action may include forcing LA maintained schools to become academies, intervening in the running of academies and free schools, or taking action to improve underperforming sponsors. Critics point out that RSC's are very expensive, and their work with HTBs is highly opaque; in the 2015 manifesto, the Liberal Democrats said that they would abolish RSCs.

6.0.5 The emergence of our highly complex school system has given rise to the 'middle tier' problem. The changes to school governance outlined above, particularly the move to an increasing number of academies outside of LA control, has left a degree of uncertainty about what body is responsible for a range of functions; namely place planning, school improvement, financial accountability, and the role of local communities in engaging with their schools. In the past such functions had been the responsibility of LAs. These are now mixed between LAs, academy schools, multi-academy trusts and regional schools commissioners.

6.0.6 This lack of clarity is problematic. Specifically; the lack of clarity around who is responsible for functions such as place planning, school improvement, financial accountability and transparency, and the role of local communities in engaging with their schools.

Question 12: What are the consequences of a diminishing role for LAs?

Question 13: What are the alternatives to intervening in schools, beyond academisation?

Question 14: Where are MATs adding value, and how can national policy best harness this?

Question 15: Who should be responsible for place planning, financial accountability, school improvement and community engagement?

7. Inspection

7.1 School Inspection

7.1.1 The trend towards increased autonomy of state schools, towards far greater diversity amongst our schools, and the state of our somewhat chaotic 'middle-tier' makes a strong case for a fit-for-purpose and rigorous inspectorate.

7.1.2 Ofsted boasts of broad success; it reports that in the last six years the number of pupils attending 'good' or 'outstanding' schools has increased by almost two million. Such reports must, though, be treated with caution; Ofsted itself ultimately determines what constitutes 'good' or 'outstanding'.

7.1.3 Ofsted continues to attract serious and broad criticism from across the education community. Much of this criticism centres around two points; the reliability and validity of judgements, and the negative impact of the inspection regime on schools, teachers and pupils.

7.1.4 The accuracy and reliability of Ofsted's judgements have been called into question, particularly with regards to lesson observation. A recent report by the think tank Policy Exchange included data analyses suggesting that the chance of an Ofsted lesson judgement aligning with actual progress made (value added) in the lesson was around fifty percent. Findings such as these have fuelled recent debate regarding the role of *any* lesson observation in school inspection.

7.1.5 There is a growing evidence base to suggest that Ofsted judgements do not correlate with actual school performance, in terms of value-added attainment data. This is concerning, as overall Ofsted judgements are heavily influenced by attainment data. Recent data analyses conducted by the EPI show that Ofsted judgements too often fail to correlate with value-added attainment

data. Data also suggest that schools with high proportions of students eligible for free school meals, and/or a high proportion of students with low prior attainment are less likely to receive a favourable grading, irrespective of actual performance.

7.1.6 Significant concerns have been raised about inspectors' understanding and interpretation of attainment data. There is also concern about the validity and reliability of judgements made around leadership, quality of teaching and progress made.

7.1.7 Teachers and school leaders raise serious concerns around the impact of Ofsted inspection on their practice. Perceptions around 'what Ofsted want', and the high-stakes nature of inspection, leads to extreme pressure on teachers, school leaders and the LA, Board or MAT that holds them to account.

7.1.8 The Ofsted grading system has been called into question. Schools receive a rating between 1 and 4; '1' being 'outstanding' and '4' inadequate. The much-coveted 'outstanding' grade often brings a significant reputational boost and grants a degree of immunity from further inspection. Critics highlight the unreliable and inconsistent nature of 'outstanding' grading, question its one-size-fits-all straightjacket and cite the unhealthy pressure that schools face to please the inspectorate.

7.2 Measuring school performance with data

7.2.1 In 2016 'Attainment 8' and 'Progress 8' were introduced as attainment measures at GCSE. Broadly, these measures provide a fairer, and more helpful way of measuring school performance than simply measuring the percentage of pupils who have achieved five A* - Cs including English and maths.

7.2.2 Attainment 8 takes a pupil's raw grades across eight qualifications. When calculating Attainment 8, English and maths are double weighted. Also taken into account are three further qualifications that count towards the English Baccalaureate (EBacc),

and three more from a wider DfE-approved list. In order to calculate Progress 8, a pupil's 'Attainment 8' score is taken and compared to that of other pupils across the country with similar prior attainment. Combining the 'Progress 8' scores of all pupils within a school effectively and fairly tells us how much comparative 'real value' a secondary school adds.

7.2.3 Despite an insistence from the Government that these measures will encourage schools to offer a broad curriculum, there are concerns from some members of the education community that they will achieve the opposite.

7.3 School Improvement

7.3.1 Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) have been made responsible for taking various forms of action where schools, or their sponsors, are failing. This is discussed above. Recent Government guidance states that three types of school, those which are 'causing concern', are eligible for formal action. These are:

- Those schools which are judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted,
- Those schools described as 'coasting', as per the DfE's definition and
- Those schools that have failed to comply with a warning notice.

7.3.2 Where a school which is maintained by a LA is judged as being 'inadequate', an 'academy order' will be issued, and the RSC will move to academise the school. Where an academy is judged as being 'inadequate' by Ofsted, the RSC will move to terminate current sponsorship arrangements, identify a new sponsor, and establish a new trust. There are significant disincentives for a Multi Academy Trust to take on a school with particularly entrenched performance issues or severe financial difficulties.

7.3.3 Coasting schools, defined by the DfE as any school (LA maintained, academy, or otherwise) in which a critically low number of pupils have made acceptable progress over three years, will be subject to intervention which may include an academisation notice. LAs and RSCs can issue warning notices to LA-maintained schools where serious concerns exist.

7.3.4 The move to identify and put pressure on coasting schools to improve is broadly welcomed, but critics accuse the Government of resorting to threats, including the threat of academisation, and suggest that such measures increase pressure on schools and school leaders.

7.3.5 There exists a great deal of variability in performance between MATs and LAs. In the ‘first comprehensive analysis of school performance in multi-academy trusts and local authorities’, the EPI compares the performance of these different groups of schools quantitatively and objectively. The EPI reports that ‘academisation does not automatically raise standards’. The report acknowledges several highly successful MATs, such as the Harris Federation and Outwood Grange, but, crucially, notes that there is *high variability* in performance, and cites a very large performance gap between the highest performing LA and the lowest performing MAT. As such, the report concludes that ‘Full academisation, especially when forced, could therefore risk damaging school outcomes’.

7.3.6 Given the high variability in performance, specifically the performance gap cited above, **an agenda of mass academisation appears to lack grounding in good evidence.**

Question 16: What should be the primary purpose of Ofsted?

Question 17: How can we mitigate against the negative effects of the pressures associated with an Ofsted visit (undue paperwork, etc.) whilst maintaining a rigorous inspection regime and high school

standards?

Question 18: Is the grading system fit for purpose? Should we move towards a binary grading system, where a school is either 'adequate', or 'inadequate'?

8. Grammar Schools

8.0.1 Rarely does an issue unite the education community to the extent that the Government's proposal to reinstate grammar schools has done so. Evidence from across the political spectrum overwhelmingly demonstrates that the reinstatement of grammar schools is extremely poor policy.

8.0.2 Whilst evidence shows that attending a grammar school boosts grades at GCSE, this effect is almost negligible amongst disadvantaged children. Data also show that those pupils who fail to get into a grammar (in areas where grammar schools still exist) do significantly worse at GCSE.

8.0.3 Aside from attainment, access to grammar schools is fundamentally unfair. Disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for free school meals, are significantly less likely to attend grammar schools. One source of this disparity is an unfair entrance system; tests are subjectable to coaching and 'gaming' – such support is clearly most likely to be provided by affluent parents.

Question 19: Is there any role for academic selection in pre-university state education?

9. Curriculum

9.1 The national curriculum, curriculum ‘narrowing’ and SRE

9.1.1 The national curriculum provides a programme of study which all LA-maintained schools must follow. Academies are not required to teach the national curriculum. English, maths, science, computing, physical education and citizenship are all compulsory subjects at Key Stage 4 (ages 14 – 16). Aside from these subjects, all secondary pupils in LA maintained schools must be allowed to study at least one subject from several categories, including the arts and modern foreign languages.

9.1.2 In 2014 changes to the national curriculum were implemented. Broadly, these changes were intended to make the curriculum more rigorous, knowledge-based and prioritise depth over breadth. Whilst some in the education community have welcomed the shift, critics argue that the revised national curriculum has resulted in a narrower programme of study. Indeed, the move towards the ‘English Baccalaureate’, a secondary school performance measure which places emphasis on perceived ‘core’ subjects, has contributed to decreased uptake of some subjects, particularly in the arts. Some exam boards have been forced to stop offering subjects which have fallen out of favour.

9.1.3 To what extent the curriculum should be ‘skills-based’ or ‘knowledge-based’, is a topic of debate within the educational community. Supporters of the 2014 reforms point out that the previous curriculum was almost entirely devoid of prescribed knowledge, and that such a curriculum risked inhibiting ‘cultural literacy’ amongst pupils. Critics of the revised curriculum suggest that the changes go too far, and that the Government has replaced a broad curriculum, which rightly prioritised the teaching of skills, with an arbitrarily narrow and fact-heavy curriculum.

9.1.4 Aside from core academic curricula, concerns exist around extra-curricular provision. Fears exist around the provision of peripatetic music, games, and extra-curricular arts. This is compounded by cuts to school and local authority funding.

9.1.5 With less than 40% of secondary schools actually obliged to teach the national curriculum (owing to their academy status), and limited means of checking whether LA schools are aligning their programme of study with the curriculum, the actual relevance of the national curriculum, certainly at secondary schools, is debateable.

9.1.6 There is considerable concern regarding the teaching of sex and relationships education. Whilst some degree of SRE is compulsory from age 11, critics point out that the curriculum is limited, outdated, and that teacher training for SRE delivery is insufficient. Some also suggest that age 11 is too late and that, in light of increased access to digital technology at a young age (increasing access to pornography and likelihood of 'sexting') pupils should be given earlier exposure to SRE. The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned for SRE being delivered earlier, and more robustly.

9.1.7 The most recent Liberal Democrat Manifesto argued for a greater presence of 'practical education' in the curriculum. In particular, it is put forward that topics such as handling personal finances, and health and wellbeing, are taught explicitly in the curriculum.

9.2 Best practice

9.2.1 'Best practice' should be defined based on good data, and used to empower our teachers. Historically, what is best practice in education has been highly changeable year-on-year; this inconsistency is, understandably, problematic for teachers and school leaders. The Liberal Democrats called for the establishment of an independent Educational Standards Authority, removed from ministerial interference.

9.3 Non-formal education

9.3.1 Children and young people spend only 15% of their waking hours in school, so it stands to reason that how they spend the other 85% will have a profound impact on their learning. Children and young people experience a range of informal and non-formal education, through their families, communities, school, local clubs and, where it still exists, the Youth Service.

9.3.2 Providing children and young people with a formal education with no recognition of these external influences neglects a hugely important factor in their educational development. More recently, the 'National Youth Agency Commission into the role of Youth Work in Formal Education', reported that youth work made an important contribution to young people's learning, particularly 'hard to reach' young people. They found that youth work matters for educational achievement, social mobility, employment and the economy, and the wellbeing of children.

9.4 Parents

9.4.1 We recognise that children spend the vast majority of their lives outside of school, with families, friends and the community. Parents and legal guardians are the biggest influence on a child and the most important resource in getting the best start in life. We recognise that the quality of parenting can have a significant impact on achievement at school, and that schools should treat parents as important partners in the education of their children. Data show that parental engagement in children's learning is the equivalent of adding several years to their education.

9.4.2 As the 'users' of the education service, it is vital that parents and pupils are, where appropriate, fully engaged with decision making at all levels; from national policy to the classroom. Schools are able to make better provision for children and young people by establishing high quality dialogue and relationships with their

parents and guardians - each can help the other to fulfil their responsibilities more effectively.

Question 20: How do we counter the decline in take-up of 'non-core' academic subjects (in particular, the languages and arts), whilst ensuring school leavers are well equipped with qualifications which hold good academic currency?

Question 21: Should we retain a national curriculum, given its dwindling impact and relevance?

Question 22: How much should the state intervene in promoting good parenting, given the clear evidence that good parenting can improve educational outcomes, and that parenting can be improved with support?

10. Examination

10.1 SATs

10.1.1 Year 6 SATs, Standard Assessment Tests, are compulsory assessments of literacy and numeracy taken by all pupils in state schools in the final year at primary school. SATs attainment data is published, and used to construct school league tables. Individual pupil attainment data is very often used to set pupils as they enter Key Stage 3.

10.1.2 SATs attract a wide range of criticism from across the education community. SATs results have profound implications for pupils, their teachers and the whole primary school; a consequence of this 'high-stakes' nature is that preparation for these narrow exams dominates programmes of study, effectively denying pupils access to a broad and rounded primary education. There is no doubt that narrowing the curriculum, 'teaching to the test', and concentrating time and resources on 'borderline' pupils boosts SATs results; it is understandable that these practices are commonplace.

10.1.3 These tests create great tension within the school system, amongst teachers, and amongst pupils.

10.1.4 SATs results serve a multitude of purposes. They are used to compare the performance of a school with others, to appraise teaching staff and leaders, to measure attainment and progress of pupils, and to serve as a baseline for Key Stage 3. Critics question whether a single set of examinations, which measure a narrow part of the curriculum, can serve all of these purposes.

10.1.5 Currently, SAT data is very often used by secondary schools to set baselines and stream pupils; a reasonable degree of trust is placed in SAT data, owing to the standardised nature of the tests. It seems sensible for national and local government to be able

to monitor primary school standards in order to identify and share best practice and support schools in need.

10.1.6 It is for the reasons outlined above that, at the 2016 Liberal Democrat Autumn Conference, Tim Farron indicated that the Liberal Democrats would move to scrap the current system of year 6 SATs.

10.2 GCSEs

10.2.1 GCSEs have recently undergone, and are currently undergoing, significant overhaul. The most recent set of GCSE results showed a decline in attainment, the first such decline for many years. Achievement of A*-C grades across all subjects decreased by 2.1%. This is likely a result of this overhaul. While the previous grade inflation was deeply problematic, a sharp shift in the opposite direction is similarly concerning.

10.2.2 The move towards the 'EBacc' (English Baccalaureate) performance measure in 2010 has likely contributed towards decreased uptake of 'non-core' subjects and subsequent narrowing of the taught curriculum. The EBacc, whilst not a qualification in itself, is 'awarded' to pupils who achieve a good pass at GCSE in English, mathematics, science, a humanities subject (limited to history and geography), and a language. The introduction of the EBacc was intended to increase the number of pupils taking subjects which hold more value to further and higher education institutions. Critics suggest that the introduction of the EBacc has contributed to the decline of schools offering subjects which fall outside of the list, including the arts.

10.2.3 It is possible that the EBacc policy is contributing to the decline in attainment across the board; influencing curriculum choices and encouraging pupils to take more challenging core academic subjects, which may not always be appropriate. There are certainly questions to ask as to who is in the best position to determine what is appropriate for young people: the national government, local government, the school, parents or the student?

10.2.4 Several other reforms to examination at GCSE are likely to have a profound impact on pupils. A new grading system, whereby pupils will be awarded a grade between '9' (highest grade) and '1', was implemented in 2015, with first results to be issued in 2017. Significantly, there will be 'more room' at the top of the scale which will help to differentiate the highest performers. There is 'less room' at the bottom of the scale; lower achievers are less likely to register a grade above '1'. There is evidence that employers do not yet understand this new system.

10.2.5 GCSEs will be assessed almost exclusively by a single (or single set of) terminal examination(s); coursework will be required only in exceptional circumstances and modular examination will be scrapped. 'Foundation tier' examinations will, largely, cease to exist, and retakes will only be offered in English and maths. This move away from modular examination, early entry with subsequent retakes, and coursework components is highly likely to contribute to a continuation of year-on-year drops in attainment across the board. It is yet to be seen if this effect will disproportionately hit disadvantaged pupils.

10.2.6 The Government has also moved to make resits in English and maths GCSEs mandatory for those pupils who failed to secure a grade 'C' or above at GCSE. This policy has, so far, led to tens of thousands of additional young people securing good passes in English and maths; something which will improve their life chances considerably. That said, several times that number of pupils *did not* improve their grade, or even dropped grades. Indeed, this policy appears to be partly responsible for the slump in GCSE attainment data. There are concerns around the effect of forced retakes on the wellbeing of those pupils who are highly unlikely to be successful regardless of how many times they resit.

10.3 AS- and A-Levels

10.3.1 AS and A-levels are also undergoing reform. These reforms are of a similar nature to those seen at GCSE. Perhaps most significantly, the AS-level, traditionally the one-year precursor to an

A-level, will be decoupled from the full A-level qualification. The AS-level will no longer contribute to the A-level, although can still be taken alongside the A-level as a 'mirror' qualification which requires no additional study. This decoupling, intended to make the A-level more rigorous, is likely to have profound effects on students.

10.3.2 Similar to GCSE, A-levels will be now be assessed via examination only (unless circumstances are exceptional), and examination will be almost entirely terminal (January exams have been scrapped). These changes present similar challenges as described above for GCSE.

10.3.3 One potential benefit of scrapping modular examination and AS-Level examination is that young people in the latter stages of their secondary and further education will take far fewer exams.

Question 23: Do we need a standardised national test at 11? If not, how can we confidently ascertain base literacy and numeracy?

Question 24: Should we force students without a 'C' grade in mathematics and English to retake?

Question 25: Up until age 11, is teacher assessment alone sufficient to measure attainment and progress?

Question 26: How do we ensure that disadvantaged pupils are not disproportionately affected by examination reforms? If they are, and the gap appears to be widening, how should we intervene?

11. Special Schools and SEND

11.0.1 Every child deserves a fair start in life including those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND).

11.0.2 There has been broad support for the move to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), however there remain major issues with ensuring EHCPs are completed quickly. Cuts to Local Government have had an impact on the resources available for setting up and implementing the plans.

11.0.3 The focus on results in Ofsted inspections has, it can be argued, led to a reduction in available resources put in by some schools to some aspects of provision for SEND. There is a long-running concern that many schools try to 'move on' children with SEND, so that their results do not impact on the results of the school. A disproportionate number of home schooled children have SEND, and there is some concern that this is because their needs are not being met in schools.

Question 27: Are EHCPs an improvement on the previous statementing process?

Question 28: What is the impact of the school testing regime on children with SEND?

12. Early Years

12.1 Early Years and attainment

12.1.1 Data from schools consistently show that children who start education behind their peers, tend to fall further and further behind throughout their school careers.

12.1.2 In the UK there has been recent progress in shrinking the size of the gap, though most of this has come about due to a narrowing of gap in the later primary years, and to some extent, into secondary. Addressing the size of the achievement gap present when students *arrive* at primary school, which the EPI estimates to account for two-fifths of gap at age 16, must be prioritised if further progress is to be made.

12.1.3 Evidence suggests that supporting children in the early years of education can pay significant dividends in improving not just their immediate academic outcomes, but also improving their life chances with respect to income, employment, health and interaction with the justice system. Furthermore, studies have shown that the average effect of early years programmes is much higher than those deployed later in a child's life, suggesting that the time where we can make most of an impact is in the pre-school years of a child's life.

12.1.4 For these reasons, whilst in government, the Liberal Democrats established the Early Years Pupil Premium. This has increased funding for early years education by £300 extra per year for each child who meets the eligibility criteria.

12.2 Child care vs. child development

12.2.1 There are concerns that the current Government policy of increasing the number of hours of free childcare available to parents of 2-4 year olds, without increasing the funding for nursery schools,

will have a detrimental impact on the *quality* of early years education – something that affects the most disadvantaged children the most.

12.2.2 Government support for childcare for 2-4 year olds can have two main roles. One is to provide subsidised childcare, so that both parents are encouraged to return to work. Another quite separate goal is to provide high quality education for young children at a crucial formative time.

12.2.3 A recurrent finding is that the largest impacts, and those most likely to translate into longer-term benefits, arise in more expensive programmes that combine centre-based and home-environment elements, or employ more qualified professionals to engage with children or their parents for extended periods of time. There are several national and international examples of such programmes having been successful in lowering the attainment gap.

12.2.4 Any Liberal Democrat early years policy must a) recognise the significant cost required to deliver high-quality programmes that can close the attainment gap, b) navigate the tension between low-cost universal programmes that help parents to return to work, and high-cost, more targeted programmes that close the attainment gap, and c) subject any programmes funded to rigorous evaluation in order to ensure intended goals are being met.

Question 29: Might the policy of free childcare (30 hours for 2-4 year olds if parents are working), perpetuate the attainment gap?

Question 30: In the early years, what should be the balance between high quality child development programme, and a childminding service for the labour market?

Question 31: What role should the state have in encouraging parents to adopt behaviours that positively impact

child development?

Question 32: How can we mitigate against the significant early educational disadvantage which is associated with summer birth?

13. Transition to Adulthood

13.1 Technical and Vocational Education

13.1.1 A significant national skills shortage has been identified. The Government reports that 14% of businesses experience a skills gap, and that the majority of these companies state that this gap has a major impact on their business. This skills shortage is likely a significant contributor to the UK's productivity gap.

13.1.2 The availability, accessibility and quality of technical and vocational further education, including apprenticeships, are significant factors in managing the UK's skills shortage.

13.1.3 Current post-16 technical options and routes have attracted criticism; most notably for their high complexity and variable quality. The recent Government's Sainsbury Review provided several recommendations for the post-16 vocational/technical landscape. The review advocates drawing a clearer line between vocational and academic post-16 routes, as well as greatly simplifying the current myriad of course routes.

13.1.4 Apprenticeships have attracted particularly staunch criticism. Despite years of Government focus and prioritisation, culminating in recent reform, significant shortcomings still exist. These reforms have prioritised participant volumes over quality, lack rigour, and fail to provide opportunities for career progression. The extent to which available apprenticeships mirror the skills gap is questionable.

13.1.5 University Technical Colleges (UTCs) were introduced in 2010 by the DfE. These schools for 14 – 18 year-olds have been established largely in response to pressure from industry over a growing skills gap, in particular with regards to skilled technicians and engineers. Generally these schools are supported by a local employer or university, and offer a curriculum weighted towards

technical education. Whilst this programme can boast of pockets of success, several concerns exist around the effectiveness of UTCs, and their impact on the wider area. Schools sharing a catchment area with a UTC are unlikely to encourage their highest attainers to be educated elsewhere; it is quite possible that UTCs, therefore, will develop into 'sink schools'. Concerns also exist around the financial sustainability of UTCs, many of which need to maintain expensive equipment.

13.2 The Post-16 Pathway to Higher Education

13.2.1 The standard route taken by pupils wishing to undertake an undergraduate degree at university is via A-Levels which are taken at sixth form.

13.2.2 Stand-alone sixth forms face significant funding difficulty due to budget cuts and obligation to pay VAT (unlike schools and academies with sixth forms, standalone sixth form colleges must pay VAT, which often costs hundreds of thousands of pounds a year). This is causing the majority of colleges to seek academy status. Many sixth forms have been forced to cut staff and decrease subject offerings. Schools with a combined sixth-forms are able to 'cross subsidise' and supplement their sixth form.

13.3 Preparing for a Career

13.3.1 High quality careers guidance, delivered from an early age, is fundamental to ensuring pupils are able to fulfil their potential and contribute in a meaningful way to the economy and to society. Excellent guidance for disadvantaged pupils is a crucial if we are to narrow inequality.

13.3.2 Careers guidance in the UK has been the subject of heavy criticism from the education community; it has been criticised for being patchy, insubstantial and for being delivered too late in a pupil's time at school.

13.3.3 Poor careers guidance is associated with high youth unemployment. Youth unemployment in the United Kingdom remains too high, hovering at around 15%. PwC estimates that this costs the UK economy £45 billion per year.

13.3.4 In the Gatsby-funded report, *Good Careers Guidance*, several benchmarks of good careers advice are laid out. The report emphasises the importance of encounters with employers, workplaces and with further and higher education providers; and that guidance should be aligned with the needs of the labour market. The importance of a stable and suitably lengthy programme of careers advice is stressed.

Question 33: Should there be more oversight of the career advice pupils receive? If so who should be responsible?

Question 34: What measures are needed to boost the quality and reputation of vocational and technical courses and settings, with greater engagement with employers?

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