

# Early Years, Education and Skills | Annual Report

## Membership 2016/17

### HM Opposition

Angela Rayner MP\*  
Gordon Marsden MP  
Mike Kane MP  
Tulip Siddiq MP

### NEC

Christine Shawcroft\*  
Jasmin Beckett  
James Asser  
Mary Turner

### CLPs and Regions

Cllr Peray Ahmet  
Natalie Fleet  
Dr Fiona Twycross AM  
Simeon Elliott  
Emma Ann Hardy  
Cllr Laura Pidcock  
Kate Purcell  
Cllr Emma Toal  
Stephanie Peacock  
Clare Lally

### Affiliates

Maggie Ryan  
Callum Munro  
Lisa Johnson  
Allana Hoggard  
Cllr June Nelson

### Elected Reps

Cllr Richard Watts  
Ian Austin MP  
Cllr Anne Western

\* Co-convenor

## Policy Development

The Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission looks at issues relating to children's wellbeing, development and care, as well as education, training and skills from childhood through adulthood.

As we plan our country's future outside of the EU it is more essential than ever that we find a sustainable skills development model and embed a culture of reskilling and retraining. The National Policy Forum (NPF) in conjunction with the wider party is responsible for developing policy in this area and others to ensure that our country is preparing children and adults for life in the modern world.

The Commission began its activity this year at a seminar at the 2016 Labour Party Conference. This was attended by the Shadow Education Secretary, Angela Rayner, Lord Watson and Gordon Marsden MP, who also serve in the Shadow Education team. NEC member, Jasmin Beckett, gave an overview of the activities of the Commission from the previous year. There was a lively debate amongst delegates about various topics within the remit of education and skills. The topic of university living costs, particularly with regard to accommodation was raised, as was Sure Start, school structures and children's social care. Also highlighted were the ongoing teacher shortage and retention crisis and the reintroduction of grammar schools that had recently been announced by the Government. Angela Rayner discussed the campaign that had been launched that week at Conference which outlined the Labour Party's opposition to the Tories' grammar schools policy.

There was a two-day meeting of the NPF in Loughborough in November 2016. Two seminars on education and skills policy took place during the weekend and both were well attended by NPF Representatives. The seminars were an opportunity for Representatives to decide what should be the main focus of the policy commission's work for the next year. In the first session, the key challenges identified in the area of education and skills were the cost and availability of childcare, the fragmentation of the schools system and the narrowing of the school curriculum. Representatives put forward ideas for what the commission should prioritise and look at for the next session based on these key challenges.

Those present in the first session also discussed modern childcare, children's social care and safeguarding, social mobility, further education, careers services and apprenticeships.

The second seminar which took place on the Sunday also identified early years and childcare as a challenge. There was additional discussion of the issues in relation to further education and adult skills and the problems the sector is facing. The second session went on to identify that the Commission should consider childcare, adult skills and children's social care as its main priorities for the year ahead. There were also discussions on Ofsted, unpaid internships, Brexit and free school meals.

The newly reconstituted Commission met for the first time in early February 2017. Co-convenor Angela Rayner MP provided an outline of the ongoing legislation that was making its way through Parliament on further education. Mike Kane MP went on to discuss areas within schools policy which the shadow frontbench were currently focusing on. These included the teaching workforce, school assessment, school structures and pedagogy in the early years phase. The Commission had a broad discussion surrounding the National Education Service policy that had been announced at Labour Annual Conference the previous September as one of the Leader's 10 pledges. It was widely agreed that the activity of the Commission should be based around developing policy under this umbrella. The priority issues of the Commission were discussed and agreed as childcare, teaching workforce, adult skills and children's social care. Members present also discussed and debated submissions that had been sent in on issues such as children's mental health services in schools and speech and language therapy. The Commission took the opportunity to discuss school funding and the likely effect the drop in school budgets was having on services such as these.

The Commission met for a second time toward the end of February. Members present discussed the Government's proposed new National Funding Formula which once rolled out would have long lasting implications for all schools. Mike Kane MP, a member of the 'f40 campaign group' which comprises of MPs whose constituencies have



historically received lower levels of funding than neighbouring areas due to the current funding formula, spoke about the new formula and its limitations. The Commission debated the merits of a new formula and it was widely agreed that whilst a new formula was needed, that no school should unfairly lose out. Members also heard from Angela Rayner MP about the forthcoming White Paper which would be laying out the Government's plans to open new grammar schools. The Commission took the opportunity to discuss the many pieces of education legislation passing through Parliament at the time. Members also spent a portion of the meeting discussing submissions they had received on teacher workload, the use of GCSEs as an accountability measure and good practice of early intervention they had seen in their local communities.

The Commission came together again in late March. At this meeting, members heard from experts in schools and adult skills policy to inform the recently launched consultation document. The National Association for Headteachers (NAHT) came to speak about various campaigns that they were currently leading on in their work. These include primary school assessment, the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc), then National Funding Formula and school structures and accountability. These were all current issues that had been considered by the Commission previously, and they were very interested to have further opportunity to discuss them. Representatives also took verbal evidence from the Learning and Work Institute about adult skills. The Commission discussed the neglect of the area in recent years and the cuts to funding. Members were concerned to hear about the decline of Family Learning Services which are delivered through schools and universities. There was also a discussion about access for people with special educational needs and people from BAME communities and the challenges they face in accessing skills training, as well as the economic benefits of adult education and the role of workplace learning. Members were keen to discuss issues that had been raised in submissions to the Commission. These topics included, but were not limited to, international students, the curriculum and school admission arrangements.

## Manifesto development

Following the announcement of an early General Election, a process of accelerated manifesto development took place. The Commission's role in this was to expedite the work from 2015 and 2016 in order to identify priorities from this work that should inform the education sections of Labour's manifesto. Representatives looked at manifesto priorities submitted by members, supporters and stakeholder groups. This was done through a series of telephone conferences which took place before the Clause V meeting which agreed the manifesto. The Commission considered all policy areas within their remit and there were varied contributions and priorities identified; many of these went on to be reflected in the final document.

## Schools

With regard to schools policy there was a firm view that Labour's policy should be about raising standards in all schools, regardless of type. The Commission were keen that Labour should keep its commitment that all teachers should have qualified teacher status. Teaching assistants and other school support staff should also receive better support within schools. Representatives said that they would like to see Labour commit to a review of school assessment and the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc) and were pleased that the manifesto committed the Party to looking at primary school assessment.

## Universal Free School Meals

The Commission wishes to pay tribute to our colleague and former Co-convenor, Mary Turner. Mary was a passionate advocate for universal free school meals and always ensured this issue remained firmly on the agenda. People will remember her for her tireless campaigning on this issue and Labour's manifesto commitment to introduce universal free school meals for primary school children at this year's election was in no small part due to her hard work.

## Teachers

The Commission has noted throughout its activity that teacher recruitment and retention is a worrying issue. Teacher workload and public sector pay restraint was identified by experts that spoke to the Commission as reasons why this has



become a growing problem. This was reflected in the manifesto, with Labour committing to lifting the public sector pay cap. Commission members want to see greater focus on trusting teachers and valuing the teaching profession and were glad that the manifesto included measures to include teachers in curriculum development.

### Early years and childcare

Commission members were clear that they wanted to see a better childcare offer than the one currently offered by the Government, with a move towards a universal childcare system in the future. Members also identified better support for families including grandparents and paternity rights as a priority. There was broad agreement that Labour should commit to protecting Sure Start and that adequate support for all families was encouraged. Representatives also highlighted that the quality of the workforce in the early years sector should be raised in order to improve social mobility. This was a key finding of the 2015/16 Children and Education Commission's Priority document. Transitioning to a graduate-led early years workforce became a key feature of Labour's early years offer at the election.

### Further education and apprenticeships

There were detailed discussions concerning further education and apprenticeships where members were keen that Labour should put further education on an equal footing with higher education. The Commission wants to see more support for people accessing apprenticeships in terms of living costs, particularly people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). On the issue of apprenticeships, the Commission's discussions to date had arrived at the conclusion that any apprenticeship schemes put forward should be done in conjunction with and inform the Industrial Strategy. In the development of apprenticeships, members indicated that they would like to see more training on the job with a focus on quality not quantity. Further education was a key theme of the education section of the manifesto, with many of the issues raised by the Commission appearing as commitments.

### Adult skills

There was a strong feeling amongst Commission members that Labour should commit to revitalising lifelong learning which has been much neglected

as a policy area. Members were keen to see adult skills become a key feature of the National Education Service, making sure that training was meeting local needs. Greater focus and investment in lifelong learning was a key feature of the manifesto with the Commission's work having informed policy development.

### University tuition fees

The debate surrounding the cost of accessing higher education appeared in many of the submissions the Commission received during this year's work programme and Representatives were very keen that access should be improved for young people to go on to higher education.

The Labour Party manifesto outlined Labour's plan to abolish university tuition fees in line with many other northern European countries in order that no-one is priced out of accessing higher education.

### Children's social care and children with SEND

Within children's social care, the Commission are concerned that children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are not receiving adequate support. Members want to see fairer admissions and better support for these children. The Labour manifesto committed to delivering a strategy for children with SEND which would include embedding SEND more substantially into teacher training.

### Current issues

#### School budgets

School funding continues to be a grave and growing problem for schools in England. Extra funding committed by the Conservatives will not stop the cuts to budgets which the Institute of Fiscal Studies have said will mean a 4.6 per cent cut between 2015 and 2018. Schools have been clear that cuts to budgets will cost teachers, school support staff and mean larger class sizes and a smaller curriculum offer.

School funding formed a key part of discussions of the Commission this year, and was frequently highlighted in many of the verbal and written submissions. Labour has been clear that no schools should lose funding so no child's education is harmed. Labour's 2017 manifesto committed the Party to properly funding the schools system in order that no teachers are lost and that all children

are given access to the resources they need to access an excellent education.

### **National Funding Formula**

In addition to funding for schools being cut, many schools have also been facing the prospect of further funding changes through the Conservatives' proposals to amend the National Funding Formula. Labour supports the principle of a new formula – the current one is based on outdated measurements and we need to ensure schools are funded according to their needs – but the proposals the Government has come forward with to date would see most schools losing funding.

The Commission had many conversations on this issue throughout the year, recognising that many areas around the country had historically been underfunded but that many more schools would lose out based on the proposed new settlement.

### **Grammar schools**

The Conservative Government's White Paper on schools, published in September 2016 outlined plans to reintroduce grammar schools into the schools system.

The grammar school debate featured heavily in the discussions of the Commission this year and many submissions also considered this policy. There was agreement that the Labour Party should oppose this policy as there is no evidence that a selective school system aids social mobility and it is contrary to Labour's commitment that all children should be given a fair chance. Following the General Election, the Conservative Government paused its plans to bring back grammar schools.

### **Teacher recruitment and retention**

Teacher recruitment and retention remains a growing problem in England. The most recent data confirmed the current rate of qualified teachers joining the profession is at its lowest for five years with the number of unqualified teachers growing. The Education Select Committee's inquiry into the issue which concluded earlier this year found that the issue is deepening with the current Government lacking a long-term plan to tackle the issue.

Many submissions discussed teacher workload as a continuing problem, with Ofsted and the assessment system being raised as having an effect. The Commission discussed these issues and heard from the NAHT who also touched on these issues. Representatives agree that this is a key problem that the Labour Party should continue to examine.

### **Adult skills and Brexit**

Brexit will weigh heavily on skills policy in England and it featured in many discussions of the Commission this year. Although it is not clear what will happen once the UK leaves the European Union, it is expected that levels of skilled migration will be hit which will place greater importance on the UK workforce and its ability to reskill and adapt.

As Brexit negotiations continue the Commission will keep a close eye on the implications these could have on changes to workers' rights and the effect immigration will have on skills and the workforce in England.

## Submissions

All submissions received by the Policy Commission are circulated to members ahead of the next meeting for consideration as part of our discussions on policy development. In 2016-17 the Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission has received and considered submissions on the following topics.

- VAT on private schools
- Work experience

- A singular examination board
- Tuition fee levels
- Attracting and retaining qualified teachers
- Behaviour management training
- Charitable status of public schools
- Childcare
- Class sizes
- Collaboration between schools
- Compulsory testing in primary schools
- Working conditions and contracts for Teaching Assistants
- Data collection
- Education Welfare Officers
- Education and Health Care (EHC) Plan
- Faith schools
- Finnish model of education
- Fragmentation of the schools system
- Free schools
- Funding for sixth form colleges
- Funding formula
- Grammar schools
- Health and wellbeing in the curriculum
- Health and social welfare support
- Local accountability of schools
- National Education Service
- Ofsted
- Professional development for teachers
- Qualified teachers in Early Years
- Regulation of alternative education providers
- Religious Education
- Rural schools
- School curriculum
- SEND staff levels
- Skills training for JSA claimants
- Support for students
- Support for teachers and staff
- Sure Start Children's Centres
- Tax subsidies for childcare
- Teacher training
- Technical colleges
- Technology and science

