

11 May 2004

Campaigning for a change in Labour policy to bring about an end to selection at 11 both by ability and aptitude

Submission in response to the National Policy Forum Consultation document “*The Best Education for All*” from Comprehensive Future

- *Comprehensive Future* was launched in 2003, by a group of Labour party members wanting to promote greater opportunity for all children through ending selection both by ability and aptitude. It has the support of many Labour MPs, Peers, union leaders, CLPs, councillors and party members.
- The Comprehensive Future website www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk has more information. Briefings can be downloaded which set out in more detail some of our arguments for change - 1. A Comprehensive Future: Ending selection for secondary education in England. 2. Selection and Higher Education. Did grammar schools offer a better way into HE for poorer students? 3. Petitions, ballots and adjudicators: How Labour has kept the status quo on selection.
- Many party members and CLPs are signing up to support the Comprehensive Future declaration which says - *I/We celebrate the achievement of over 30 years of comprehensive schools in delivering improvements in both pupil achievement and in participation in further and higher education. I/We reject the assumption that general ability or specific aptitude is fixed or predetermined or that this can be definitively assessed by the age of transfer to secondary school. I am /We are concerned about the dangers of social exclusion and increasing inequalities between schools. Wales and Scotland have successful comprehensive systems. I/We want the next Labour manifesto to be bold enough to make clear the virtues of a comprehensive system and promise to extend this system to England by ending all selection by ability and aptitude within the first two years of the next parliament.*
- **In summary our response to the document is that we wish to see it amended to spell out the need to end selection on ability and aptitude and promise action to bring that about within the first two years of the next parliament. The next Labour government must take the lead and encourage an end to selection.**

Below we set out the background to our proposed amendment.

1. Experience has shown that it is impossible for change to come through the existing petition and balloting procedures or through the decisions of adjudicators. Amending the existing legislation is not the way forward. There are many reasons for this, which our website briefing makes clear. A major reason is that, unlike any other school reorganisation, there is no plan for change put forward for consultation leading to local determination. In contrast if any LEA proposes a school reorganisation or admission authority proposes a change in admission criteria there is a statutory system of

consultation on a clear plan. As well as this hurdle, there are huge practical difficulties - a few examples - the definition of an eligible parent results in some parents who should be involved being left out and other parents over represented; petition forms cannot be sent out through schools; all the signatures have to be collected in one year. How many General Elections would be held if one in five of the electorate had to sign a petition first?

2. At national level, Government provides no leadership, funding or supporting evidence to encourage an organised change to a local comprehensive system. However Government action in Northern Ireland has been very different. Following Government funded research and consultations a Government decision has been made to end the 11 plus, and this is currently being implemented. There have been no petitions and ballots. It is likely that there are fewer children in N Ireland affected by the 11plus than in England. Selection affects children and their educational opportunities. Ending it is too important to be left to petitions and ballots.
3. There are many reasons to end selection -

- **It would raise standards overall**

Professor David Jesson's research indicates that in the 15 wholly selective English LEAs the proportion of schools in special measures is higher than in comparable LEAs; the proportion of schools facing challenging circumstances is almost double that in non selective LEAs. This is despite the fact that many of the selective LEAs serve relatively advantaged communities. He concludes that *selective education depresses the performance of whole communities, and this at a time when the emphasis is on doing everything possible to enhance a nation's educational performance.* **Selective systems of education -Blueprint for lower standards? David Jesson. in Education Review 15 (1) 2001.**

The OECD PISA report examined the effect of systems of education in OECD countries. It found that the more differentiated and selective an education system is the larger the performance differences between students for more and less advantaged family backgrounds **Education Policy Analysis OECD 2002.**

Ending selection could play a vital role in the Government's plans to transform secondary education and tackle the long tail of underachievement, an important task as we develop the education system to give all young people skills for life.

- **It would reduce social divisions and promote inclusion**

The comparison between the proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals in selective and non selective secondary schools (2.7% compared to 17.1%) illustrates the stark social division as a result of selection **Written Parliamentary Answer Estelle Morris 1 November 2000.**

In Buckinghamshire, a fully selective LEA, for example, there is clear evidence that selection discriminates against children on the basis of class, race and special needs. The non selective schools in Bucks have 11% of their pupils eligible for free school meals, compared to 1% in the grammar schools; there are 30% ethnic minority pupils compared to 18% in the grammar schools; and 21% with special educational needs compared to 4% in grammar schools **The Penalty Costs of Upper School Funding. Levacic, March and Newson IoE. October 2002 .**

In 2003 the number of year 11 pupils taking GCSEs/GNVQs in grammar schools was 21690 of which 34 (0.16%) had statements of SEN. The equivalent figure for all maintained (including grammars), CTCs and academies was 559841 of which 14359 (2.56%) had statements. **2003 GCSE results**

A recent report showed the rate at which the performance of children from different social classes diverges during secondary schools is faster in areas where the 11 plus is retained. It called for *the removal of all types of selection within the maintained system, and the establishment of admission policies geared towards maximising the social mix in any school.* **Child Poverty and Education Briefing Paper End Child Poverty and National Children's Bureau 2003**

- **It would extend school choice to more parents**

Where there is selection schools choose their intake, (in direct contrast to patient choice intended to give patients a choice of hospitals). Selection reduces choice for the majority of children and parents. It is divisive not diverse. Only fully comprehensive admissions systems, where schools are open to all, provide the widest choice of schools. A broad curriculum within schools allows the individual needs of all pupils to be met.

- **It would encourage more young people to remain in education post 16 and equip them with the skills for life.**

Page 5 of the document says 'International league tables put us 25th out of 29 for staying on rates'. Extending comprehensive education in England would improve this. Children given a message at 11 that they have failed are unlikely to be encouraged to stay on after compulsory education. At a recent Comprehensive Future fringe meeting reports from Trafford (a fully selective LEA) indicated that the staying on rate there is lower than comparable LEAs. Grammar schools do little to promote poor children to stay on post 16. A recent PQ showed that the very small proportion of young people eligible for free school meals in grammar schools is reduced even further in their sixth forms (2.3% 11-15 to 1.5% 16-18) **Stephen Twigg. PQ 31.3.2004.** The Government's target is for 50% of young people to go into Higher Education, in fully selective LEAs this will require recruiting many of the young people who have been failed at 11, this is hardly likely.

Comprehensive education enables young people to learn to live and work together with others of all backgrounds, ability and ethnic origin. This consultation on education policy should involve young people in schools and recent school leavers to ask them what they have valued about comprehensive education.

- **It would save money enabling it to be diverted to children in classrooms, where it should be spent**

There are financial costs of selection as well as social ones. Over £1million of public money has been spent on collecting information for ballots which do not happen. There are substantial transport and administration costs arising from selective systems. A recent OFSTED report on selective Buckinghamshire said *'due to the selective system and the rural nature of much of the county, transport costs are high.* **Buckinghamshire: A report from the Office for Standards in Education in conjunction with the Audit Commission. February 2004.** As teachers cannot now be asked to administer or invigilate tests because of the work load agreement the costs of selection will rise in all selective areas. It is estimated that in selective Trafford, for example, because of this, the costs of running the

selective system will now rise by £100,000 to over £400,000, this does not include the costs of appeals. This is money which would be better spent on all children in schools.

4 . Some specific responses to points made in The Best Education for All.

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We want to raise the aspirations and attainment of primary children particularly those from poorer backgrounds...

Surely where children are divided up at 11 by entry tests this must lower the aspirations of the majority, the poorest, who are failed by selection? Schools which take the children who have failed know that their first job will be to try to restore their pupils' self esteem. In comprehensive systems children do not start with this disincentive to make the most of the next stage of their education. All primary schools are fully comprehensive, why when children reach 11 is it necessary to divide them into different institutions?

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Selection is actually used by only a very small number: about 6% of specialist schools use selection by aptitude (not by ability)

The legislation allows all secondary schools which consider they have a specialism, to select up to 10% on aptitude in specific subjects. In practice this is easier for schools which are their own admission authorities ie foundation and voluntary schools. Legislation allows all schools to become admission authorities.

Allowing schools to select on aptitude must be the only bit of legislation which is justified on the basis that it is little used. Although only a few select now unless this legislation is repealed there is nothing to stop more and more schools selecting in the future, resulting in large numbers of children sitting more admission tests.

It is important to focus on the effect selective entry has on children. More than 10% will actually sit the tests, for example recently 300 children auditioned for 15 places on musical aptitude for a new Wandsworth secondary school which is also a C of E school.

In any case there are many concerns that aptitude cannot be separated from ability. MPs on the all-party Education and Skills Committee recently concluded *'We are not satisfied that any meaningful distinction between aptitude and ability has been made and we have found no justification for any reliance on the distinction between them'. ... We are not convinced of the case for selection on aptitude.* **Secondary Education: Diversity of Provision. House of Commons Education and Skills Committee May 2003.** Recent research on admissions found *'The distinction between aptitude, ability and achievement is not clear. For example, one school made reference to selecting up to 10 per cent of pupils on the basis of 'proven aptitude in music'; the accompanying notes state that children applying under this criterion 'must have achieved at least Grade III of the Associated Board...in an instrument or voice'. This can be construed as a measure of ability or aptitude or achievement - or all three.'* **Secondary school admissions in England: Exploring the extent of overt and covert selection. West and Hind. RISE www.risetrust.org.uk April 2003**

'We can never return to the 11plus and must stay 'true to Labour's core values of opportunity and inclusion'

Many children across England have never left the 11plus, and it is misleading to refer to 'returning' to it. This statement should be removed from the document. 15 Local Education

Authorities have fully selective systems, Bexley, Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Kingston, Lincolnshire, Medway, Poole, Reading, Slough, Southend, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral. Another 21 have some grammar schools with several LEAs having fully selective towns. It is because we want to support inclusion and extend opportunity for all that we want to see an end to selection.

'The Government has... set up a system of school adjudicators and local parental ballots to deal with disputes about the organisation of schools and has made provision for local parental ballots in those relatively few areas where children are selected for grammar schools at age 11.'

There is confusion here about the role of the adjudicator and ballots. There are no ballots over partial selection or disputes over school organisation. Ballots are involved only if there is a petition to trigger a ballot over grammar schools. School organisation committees consider proposals for school reorganisation and if they cannot reach a unanimous decision it is referred to the Adjudicator. In the main only admission authorities and school governing bodies can appeal to the adjudicator against proposals from schools to be partially selective. Schools which were partially academically selective before 1997 can continue to select unless an appeal to the adjudicator is successful. In this situation only, parents can appeal to the adjudicator. Proposals to select on aptitude cannot be appealed against by parents, unless it is over 10% and existed before 1997.

Some adjudications have ruled to reduce selection but some rulings have been overturned by the courts by schools and LEAs wishing selection to continue. The adjudicator has no role over ending selection in grammar schools. Indeed a recent adjudicator's decision will allow an increase in grammar school places in Skipton.

This whole process is cumbersome and costly. The fact that the document could not get this right indicates how unnecessarily complex the situation is. If Government acted to bring about an end to selection this role of the adjudicator would not be needed, and much public money saved.

The areas where children are selected for grammar schools at age 11 are not 'relatively few'. There are no grammar schools in Scotland or Wales but in England there are grammar schools in 36 of the 150 LEAs. The 15 listed above as fully selective make up 10% of English LEAs.

Selection of the few means rejection for the many. Since the 164 grammar schools take 4.6% of English secondary pupils, it can be assumed that at least another 13.8% are rejected, so over 18% (almost 1 in 5) of English 11 year olds are being directly affected by selection into grammar schools. **Charles Clarke Oral Answer 18.3.2004** These recent figures also show that the number of grammar school places has risen while Labour has been in office. Not included in this total are the numerous children affected by partial selection, or those taking several ability or aptitude tests for different schools.

Conclusion

- After 7 years of Labour government more children face selective entry tests - either on ability or 'aptitude'- for their secondary education than when Labour took office. The assertion that Labour would not 'return to the 11plus' ignores the many children across England who have never left it.

- Ending selection at 11 would raise standards overall, promote social inclusion, encourage more young people to remain in education post 16 and equip them with the skills for life, extend school choice to more parents and increase opportunity for all children. It would also release more money to be spent in classrooms.
- The current system of petitions, ballots and adjudicators will not bring about change. The Government has to take the lead in encouraging change to a fairer system.
- Comprehensive Future wants to see that the National Policy Forum's consultation process result in a policy change promising action to bring about an end to selection on ability and aptitude within the first two years of the next parliament.

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