

# Comprehensive Future

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## Selection at the Labour Party Conference September 29th 2004

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The policy document on education and health which contained the resolution agreed at Warwick was discussed on Wednesday morning of conference. It was passed. Several people wanted to raise selection in the debate but were not called. However in the Question and Answer session which followed there were three questions calling for an end to selection. Charles Clarke expressed his personal lack of support for the eleven plus but argued again for the status quo.

The lunch-time Comprehensive Future fringe - Ending Selection - Third Term Lucky followed immediately after the debate and was very well attended.

Introducing the meeting the Chair Fiona Millar said how over recent months the Comprehensive Future steering group had shifted from hope to despair and back again as it aimed to end selection as Labour party policy. In an introductory message of good will Tony Benn, who had come as a member of the audience, pledged his support and described his disappointment in government policy on selection but his belief that Comprehensive Future was working with the tide. His wife, Caroline had been such a strong advocate of comprehensive education and of its aim - the discovery of the genius in every person.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath described the educational apartheid which selection brings about in Birmingham. The current local balloting legislation would not bring about change and the argument had to go to national level. We are, he said, aiming for equity and fairness in health provision, education must be the same. Another ex Health Minister Frank Dobson said that abolition of selection would be right, fair and popular and should be part of a progressive agenda for the next parliament. Selection is the reverse of parental choice. We have, he said, a duty to all our children. The guidance on admissions must be changed into firm regulations, interviews must not be allowed to come back as 'structured discussions', children should not be selected on ability or aptitude and LEAs should be required to draw up plans for consultation to end selection.

John Edmonds said it seems that the rhetoric against selection is in place in party policy but we still have a problem with the reality. Selection is not a small problem, it affects roughly one in five children in England. If it is right that there should be a local choice why not bring in and end to selection but allow local ballots to opt out of the change? We must continue to make a noise within the party about selection.

Several points about the way forward were raised in discussion and they will be looked at by the Comprehensive Future steering group at their next meeting.

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