



Confederation of School Trusts

Early Years, Education and Skills: Towards a National Education Service

Response of the Confederation of School Trusts (CST)

A Introduction

- 1 The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) represents circa 1,000 academies, multi-academy trusts and foundation schools, representing joined up leadership across executive, governance and business leaders. We are the national organisation and sector body for school trusts. This places us in a strong position to consider the National Education Service from the viewpoint of the system's executive and governance leaders in self-governing schools and trusts.
- 2 We are completely apolitical. We work with political parties and politicians across the spectrum to advance education in the public interest. As our predecessor organisation, FASNA, we have a long history of working with the Labour Party to develop and influence education policy. Previously, we have worked with Andy Burnham, Stephen Twigg, Tristram Hunt and Lucy Powell.
- 3 CST welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

B Responses to consultation questions

1. What should a National Education Service be for and what values should it and the draft charter embody?

- 1.1 CST agrees that "education has intrinsic value in giving all people access to the common body of knowledge we share, and practical value in allowing all to participate fully in our society." We believe that education is a public good.
- 1.2 The values of a National Education Service should underpinned by the [Principles of Public Life](#) and the ethics of public service:
 - **Integrity:** putting the ethical obligations of public service above political or personal interest;
 - **Objectivity:** basing policy and decisions on an analysis of the evidence;
 - **Impartiality:** acting solely in the interests of serving equally well all children and young people;

- **Equality:** the principle that achievement can be realised at scale for *all* children and young people – the explicit rejection of determinism either by social background or by perceived intelligence.
- **Inclusivity:** the principles of equity, social justice, participation and the realisation of citizenship – the removal of barriers of discrimination and oppression and the wellbeing of *all* children and young people.

2. What amendments, if any, should be made to the principles outlined in the draft charter for the National Education Service?

2.1 A small amendment should be made to principle six: “All areas of *knowledge*, skill and learning deserve respect.”

2.2 Based on the evidence set out in section 4 (below) we would propose an amendment to principle seven: “Educational excellence is best achieved through *structural* collaboration between groups of schools with a focus on the quality of teaching, curriculum and assessment. The National Education Service will be structured to encourage and enhance cooperation across boundaries and sectors.”

3. What additional principles should be considered for the charter of the NES?

3.1 It is desirable to retain a shorter rather than longer list of principles – ten principles for a charter is a reasonable number. However we note that the principles are currently silent on the core business of education – the quality of teaching, curriculum and assessment. Our proposed amendment to principle seven may assist, but we believe strongly that an education charter which does not mention teachers, curriculum and assessment is deficient. We would also ideally want to include the ethics of public service and the principles of public life.

3.2 The principles are currently also silent on a properly *funded* National Education Service. We believe there is more that can be done in and by groups of schools to ensure that curriculum leads financial planning and to consider economic efficiencies across the group, but we should *not* pursue fiscal policies which damage curriculum breadth or the supply of teachers. Investment in our education system is investment in the future prosperity of our country.

4. What barriers currently exist to cooperation between education institutions, and what steps can be taken to remove them and ensure that cooperation is a central principle of our education system?

- 4.1 We'd like to start by a very short review of the evidence on the kinds of inter-school cooperation that demonstrates greatest impact.
- 4.2 Research shows that the impact of cooperation and partnership is greatest where schools work together in *structural groups*, notably federations (enabled by the Education Act 2002) and charitable trusts (Academies Act 2010).
- 4.3 The most notable research is a large-scale study with federations, the findings of which suggest pupils attending certain types of federation outperformed a matched sample of their peers in non-federated schools in terms of their attainment (Chapman and Muijs, 2014).
- 4.4 The Chapman and Muijs research also found that:
- There is a time lag of two to four years between formation of the federation and when their performance overtakes their non-federated counterparts.
 - Secondary school federations outperform other types of collaboratives.
 - Secondary federations with executive leadership outperform federations with traditional leadership structures (one headteacher leading one school).
 - Becoming a federation has an economic impact on schools. By definition, the size of a federation requires a larger budget than for an individual school. However, the increased costs are offset by greater resources and capacity for change.
 - Federal structures promote opportunities for professional learning and collaboration.
- 4.5 There is also evidence of the impact of collaborations of this kind on school improvement. Many studies report improvements in areas such as staff professional development and career opportunities (Hill et al., 2012; West, 2010); sharing good practice and innovation (Stoll, 2015; Chapman et al., 2009a); reductions and realignments in headteacher workload and organisational and financial efficiency (Woods et al., 2010; Woods et al., 2013).
- 4.6 Research points to the positive influence of collaboration on teachers and teaching, with teachers reporting an increased motivation to engage in professional dialogue with their peers, knowledge mobilisation and a general shift towards more learning-oriented and enquiry-based cultures in schools that have been collaborating (Stoll, 2015). There is also evidence of collaboration facilitating curriculum development and problem-solving (Ainscow et al., 2006).
- 4.7 Collaboration can also provide opportunities for leadership development. Teachers have increased opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities both within and between schools in the group (Hill, 2010; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009).
- 4.8 The main barrier to this kind of structural cooperation is a lack of clear vision about an 'end state.' Our education system is half-reformed. It is now time to be clear that all schools should be in a strong and sustainable group – we are agnostic about the legal form that these groups

could or should take. The two most obvious legal vehicles are federations and charitable trusts (multi-academy trusts), but it is possible for a future Labour government to create other (or variations on) legal vehicles. For example, it would be possible to enable high performing local authorities to create education trusts for groups of schools.

4.9 We believe the two principles should be:

- Schools in a strong and sustainable structural group; and
- The group should be established purely for *the advancement of education in the public interest* – this puts moral purpose at the heart of the group of schools.

4.10 It may be interesting to note that schools in Ontario (one of the highest performing jurisdictions in the world) has structurally integrated groups of schools, separate from municipal authorities.

5. Through which channels and mechanisms should the public be able to hold educational institutions to account, and how should this vary across different educational bodies?

5.1 In our view local government should not attempt to retain a ‘provider-role’ in education.

Instead, it should support schools to form strong and sustainable groups legally separate from local government working in deep partnerships, collectively responsible for pupil outcomes, with strong cultures of collaborative professional learning. We cite the evidence for this in section four above.

5.2 We recognise the key role of local government as conveners of partners in a place to promote economic development, create the conditions for good social outcomes and protect and promote the life chances of local children and young people and their families. We want local government to take a more strategic role in education, using their civic capability and capacity to unblock challenges in the local education system.

Democratic accountability

5.3 We recognise the question of democratic accountability in relation to education is key. We do not think this is best achieved through a provider role (local government ‘maintaining’ schools).

5.4 Democratic accountability could be exercised through a strong, statutory scrutiny function with powers of referral to the Secretary of State and/or the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee. Under the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, statutory scrutiny powers hold to account health commissioners and providers to ensure they are providing effective, efficient services, which meet the health and wellbeing needs of their residents and encourages improvement.

5.5 However, Scrutiny in this context allows *backbench* councillors to hold council officers and Cabinet to account through public scrutiny of policies, services and forthcoming decisions; and call-in of decisions taken where these cause enough concern amongst backbench councillors that they believe they should be reconsidered.

5.6 We envisage statutory scrutiny powers of education not to be a backbench function, but rather conceptualised as enabling relevant Executive/ Cabinet posts to publicly scrutinise the decisions of all education actors in their locality.

Education governance at regional level

5.7 We propose a step-change in the Office of the National Schools Commissioner and the regional school commissioner function. We would encourage the Labour Party to consider primary legislation to:

- Create regional education jurisdictions with education commissioners responsible for all schools/ groups of schools in an area.
- Simplify and make more efficient the arrangements for scrutiny, intervention and support.
- Remove of the statutory role of the director of children's services (DCS) in relation to standards and intervention in schools as this is an expensive duplication – in any case, DCSs are increasingly social care professionals whose primary focus is rightly the quality of children's social care.
- Create statutory education scrutiny committees (as above) with power of referral to the Secretary of State/ National Audit Office/ Public Accounts Committee to call in decisions by the education commissioners and leaders of federated groups/ multi-academy trusts.
- Appoint education commissioners by an Order in Council, on the recommendation of the regional education jurisdiction's governing board (which could include representation from local government) thus, each education commissioner is an office holder under the Crown, accountable to Parliament and technically independent of the Department for Education or the Secretary of State.
- Reclassify the Office of the Schools Commissioner as a non-ministerial department.

5.8 Each education commissioner could be required to publish an annual report. They would hold public office and would be publicly accountable. There must be a strong commitment to transparency – the system must be prepared to open itself up to scrutiny, publish open data and 'open source' its processes, practices and ideas.

6. What can we do to reduce the fragmentation of the education system, and to move towards an approach that is integrated and promotes lifelong learning?

6.1 Following the evidence in section four above, set out a vision for all state-funded schools to be part of a strong and sustainable structural group. And as per section five above, re-engineer system governance.

6.2 The proposed structural groups of schools should be civic bodies with a strong sense of civic responsibility. They should work with other civic and education bodies (colleges, universities, and other education providers) to provide integrated local pathways that promote lifelong learning.

7. How do we improve the quality of early years' education, in particular with relation to qualifications and staffing levels?

7.1 A child's early years lay the foundation for all that is to come. Early education plays a critical role during this important developmental period. Arguably, we have not done enough to connect the science about how children learn in these crucial years to an early years' curriculum. Labour could commit to undertaking a comprehensive year of the early years foundation stage with an explicit focus on understanding what the implications are of developments in cognitive neuroscience.

7.2 Once this is properly understood, a comprehensive overhaul of teacher education in the early years will be necessary. It is imperative that early years' teachers know *how* children learn, *what* we want children in the early years to be able to know and do, and in what order.

8. How do we achieve genuine parity of esteem between academic and vocational/technical education? How do we improve outcomes for those young people who do not choose to follow what is seen as the traditional academic route?

8.1 We believe the dualism at the heart of this question is a fundamental part of the problem and is at odds with principle one of the NES. A core academic curriculum is the right of every child. This curriculum must be based on the "common body of knowledge we share" (NES principle one). Specialisation within subject domains and professional fields comes as a consequence of proper access to this common body of knowledge. In some cases, specialisms will take young people into more technical areas, but this must *never* be at the expense of access to the common body of knowledge – the core academic curriculum.

8.2 We therefore propose that Labour policy seeks to disrupt and reject the division of education into academic or vocational/teaching routes. Education must first and foremost be about

“access to the common body of knowledge we share, and practical value in allowing all to participate fully in our society.”

8.3 Labour education policy should reaffirm this principle, and then identify how best to support young people make decisions about specialising in their chosen subject or field and how these pathways are constructed – not as technical/vocational – but truly as specialist fields.

9. What can be done to ensure that the NES has the staff it needs, in particular with reference to the ongoing crisis in teacher recruitment and retention?

9.1 Structurally integrated groups of schools can do things which are much harder for ‘standalone’ schools. There is already a network of school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) organisations, although these are not evenly dispersed across the country. A Labour government could take a more strategic approach to ensuring that SCITTs are evenly dispersed and working closely with one more higher education institution. The SCITTs could bring sub-regional intelligence about teacher supply issues to feed into the Teacher Supply Model (TSM) so that strategic interventions could then be made on the basis of good sub-regional intelligence to shore up the teacher supply pipeline and address specific regional and sub-regional issues in teacher supply.

9.2 A Labour government should also explicitly begin to build public confidence in the state education system. The narrative of a ‘broken’ system must stop. Nine out of ten schools in England are good or better. Our narrative should be built on *good* local schools working together for the advancement of education in the public interest.

10. What steps can be taken, at both the training stage and during continuing professional development (CPD), to ensure that teachers and support staff have the knowledge and resources they need to teach the whole curriculum? For instance, with reference to mandatory, age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

10.1 We believe the example of PSHE as part of this question is misplaced. PSHE is a part of the *curriculum*. We want to focus here on teacher education, expertise and quality.

10.2 Teaching quality is important. It is the greatest lever at our disposal for improving the life chances of children and young people (Hattie, 2015), particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (William, 2016).

10.3 Teacher education is crucial and not sufficiently understood. The naming of initial education as ‘training’ is unhelpful and does little to help us understand that teachers are professionals who

must build *expert knowledge*. This is not achieved through ‘training’ – it requires deep subject and pedagogical knowledge and is underpinned by a body of professional knowledge. And it is unlikely to be achieved through trying to make teachers have knowledge of the whole curriculum. Teachers must understand the educational philosophy that underpins a particular curriculum, and they must understand how this philosophy translates for their subject, but what we require of *expert* teachers is their depth of subject knowledge.

10.4 The newly established [Institute for Teaching](#) is helping us, as its director Matt Hood says: “to think harder about what teachers need to know and be able to do and in what order – not just for their first year but for every year; we need to think harder about pedagogy and assessment; and we need to think harder about teacher educators – being a great teacher is a good start, but it’s just a start. How do we best prepare those professionals tasked with teaching our teachers how to teach?”

10.5 In short, we must invest at least as much effort into developing teachers as they put into teaching their pupils. And we must do this over the course of a professional life so that teachers continue to build their expertise and continue to learn.

In conclusion, we would be delighted to support the Labour party to develop the NES proposals and would be happy to be consulted and/or involved further in his important work.

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Chief Executive

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