

John Poynton's UKIP Policy Discussion Paper No.6

Education

Primary and Secondary education – the Problem

At practically every hustings I have attended as a candidate there has been a question from a parent in the audience saying that their child is falling behind in school and what are we politicians going to do about it? It was tempting to say that the Tories are only interested in the brightest and the best, and Labour are only interested in their potty social engineering ideologies, so only UKIP will tackle this. I desisted, but clearly our schools system is dysfunctional with increasing numbers emerging illiterate and innumerate.

In 2019 6.8% of school children were excluded from school either temporarily or permanently. And that is only the tip of the iceberg as many more fall behind without being excluded. The conveyor belt which is the national curriculum just moves on without them. In addition increasing numbers of children are being persuaded not to sit exams in case they damage their school's position in the league tables. These children will attain their adulthoods unemployable. Is it any wonder so many turn to crime and radicalism as well as suffer mental disorders? If your own culture has let you down so badly why wouldn't you try something else? The result is hugely damaging for both the victims and their families as well as for the taxpayer. It cannot be allowed to continue.

Another problem arises with funding. In 2019 the average class size in the state sector was 27.1, and the number of pupils is growing as a result of a baby boom caused by high levels of immigration and our dysfunctional welfare system which pays people on benefits to have children. I deal with immigration and welfare reform elsewhere, but we also need to find more support for teachers to improve efficiency without increasing the education budget.

The problem of grade inflation also remains an issue, as was highlighted once again this year with the coronavirus fiasco.

Primary and Secondary education – the Solution

1. Get rid of SATS and school league tables and substitute GCPEs (General Certificate of Primary Education) exams. These should be taken in the first term of secondary school so that they are conducted independently of a child's primary school and have nothing to do with choice of secondary school. Their purpose is purely to find out how much the child has learnt to date and therefore what curriculum it needs to follow to catch up or go at a pace it can manage. The children would be set and streamed according to their GCPE results. Clearly slower children will not be able to cover the same breath of syllabus as the faster ones, but they can focus on the essentials and succeed there to ensure employability. The GCPEs may be retaken any number of times, like driving tests, and be available to older people wanting to make a fresh start. The number of GCPE subjects should be limited. A pass at GCPE, say grade C or above, should be required for access to GCSE in that or other dependent subject. Some children will have a mixed level of courses in secondary school,

including possibly even GCSEs and A-levels later on, but will always be able to participate with peers of their own age in all other activities.

2. Allocate higher budgetary precepts to the slower steams in secondary school, so they can have smaller class sizes, more experienced teachers, more time for pastoral care, one-to-one and tutorial teaching, in fact wherever it takes to get those children over those hurdles.

3. Provide universal high-standard online courses at all stages, GCPE, GCSE and A-level, perhaps provided for example by the Open University, so that children can go back and reinforce past lessons, and so that teachers can be relieved of much of the burden of formal classroom teaching in favour of more direct support and tutorial teaching.

4. Standardise exam grades as a percentage of candidates: say 15% get 'A's, 20% 'B's, 20% 'C's, 20% 'D's. 15% 'E's and 10% 'F's or some such. That then gives a clear indication from the percentage marks at each step whether the papers are getting easier or more difficult, as well as giving employers a consistent basis of differentiation. The 2020 coronavirus fiasco also could easily have been averted by taking the higher of the algorithm and teacher's assessment results for each child and then applying the standard grade percentages.

5. Introduce the National Credit Card (see separate policy paper No. 4) so that any parent no matter how poor can choose an independent school education for their child at an affordable fee. We should be celebrating our independent schools, not persecuting them but encouraging diversity and choice of provision. They are amongst the best in the world as witnessed by the high and growing number of foreign students they teach, and it is a tragedy so few British children are able to attend them. Grammar schools could become semi-independent schools with the state paying for half the standard secondary school budget and the balance charged to parents under the NCC system. Fees could vary.

6. Oppose gender confusion ideologies and the implementation of compulsory LGBT-inclusive relationships education in primary schools. Inter-gender discussions and one-to-one private conversations about relationships should be encouraged in sixth form.

Higher education – the Problem

In Germany approximately 25% of school leavers go on to university, and most of the rest go into their dual VET (vocational educational and training) apprenticeship system; part academic and part on-the-job. It is not perfect and requires early specialisation which would not be appropriate here, but it is very effective. Here, because of Labour's preoccupation with class-consciousness, we try to put as many as possible through university; currently around 32% at a cost of £16bn in student loans, very little of which gets paid back and has to be written off. The result is a severe shortage of skilled artisans and a sea of over-qualified and disillusioned graduates who cannot find the professional level jobs and incomes they were promised by Tony Blair and others because the number of such jobs available bears no relation to the numbers of graduates produced. The best go on to do professional qualifications on a dual-training basis, yet still we are short of top quality doctors, nurses, engineers and so on. Meanwhile huge amounts of taxpayers money is wasted and the quality and respect for university degrees is diluted. Entry standards are also being reduced in order to fill over-provided places.

Higher education – the Solution

1. Retain the student loans system but gradually increase the entry qualifications required to access them so that the proportion of loans repaid increases to 50%. Allow excess university provision to be wound up, or converted to apprenticeship support. Universities can continue to provide places for students paying their own way at their discretion. Fee levels should be determined by each university and may vary, but universities should be subject to profit-capping at 5% to prevent profiteering.
2. Student loans should be written off annually by one-thirtieth each year, the amount written off being the balance of this amount after deducting the amount the graduate is required to pay that year. This will enable the graduate to see the balance reducing each year. Legacies or other savings used to pay down loans at a faster rate should be free of taxes such as income, capital gains and inheritance tax.
3. Provide partial grant support for those skills where there are shortages such as the STEMM subjects. The level of support can be varied over time and by subject to keep supply and demand in balance.
4. Ensure all essential public services such as the NHS have proper top management, including a Human Resources director, to ensure proper and sufficient staff resource planning and professional training is provided.
5. Review the apprenticeship system to ensure employers are fully committed to it, redesigning where necessary. The planning and provision should be employer led but state coordinated, supported as necessary and encouraged. Let's aim at 50% of school leavers taking up apprenticeships. That would mean gradually increasing employer support until that target is achieved.