

Chair

David Chaytor MP

Secretary

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Dear Colleague,

Welcome to the first newsletter from *Comprehensive Future*.

Comprehensive Future was initiated by a letter to Labour constituencies signed by over 150 Labour Party members including MPs, peers, union leaders and local councillors. Its aim is to end selection as Labour Party policy.

The current consultation on education policy – *The Best Education for All*, (available from the Labour Party or on www.labour.org.uk/consultingonpolicydocuments) offers a chance for members and others to make their views clear. When this round ends there will be another round within the party culminating in the policy decisions which will be made by the National Policy Forum in Summer 2004. This policy will be brought to the party conference in the Autumn of 2004.

Please NOW —

- Respond to the current consultation calling for an end to selection. If your area has selective schools make sure you respond. Send a copy to *Comprehensive Future*.
- Enclosed with this newsletter are some leaflets. Please order many more and distribute them in your area.
- If there are policy forums in your area distribute the leaflets and speak in support of an end to selection as party policy. If you are organising a forum ask *Comprehensive Future* for a speaker.
- Overleaf is a suggested resolution. *Comprehensive Future* wants to demonstrate its wide support. Please propose this resolution at local meetings to send both to the Labour Party and to *Comprehensive Future*. We want to gather the support of as many branches as possible.
- If you will be at the party conference come to our fringe meeting, details below.
- Visit our website on www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk where there is a copy of the submission *Comprehensive Future* has made to this round of consultation.

David Chaytor MP Bury North

Chair Comprehensive Future

Dates

30th September 2003

Comprehensive Future and SEA joint fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference

6pm Norfolk Royale Hotel, Richmond Hill, Bournemouth
Selection – The English Disease?

2nd October 2003

The first round of consultation ends on the National Policy Forum Consultation Document – *The Best Education for All*
Send your response by email to education@ndew.labour.org.uk or by post to The Policy Unit, Labour Party, 16 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP

Comprehensive
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Selection – not a big issue?

Education Ministers dismiss selection as not a big issue. In fact in England it is an important factor in secondary education.

- 15 of the LEAs in England (Bexley, Bournemouth, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Kingston, Lincolnshire, Medway, Poole, Reading, Slough, Southend, Sutton, Torbay, Trafford and Wirral) can be considered fully selective. About 1 in 5 of their secondary pupils are in grammar schools.
- Another 21 LEAs have grammar schools (Barnet, Birmingham, Bromley, Calderdale, Cumbria, Devon, Enfield, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kirklees, Lancashire, Liverpool, North Yorkshire, Plymouth, Redbridge, Stoke on Trent, Telford and Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire and Wolverhampton).
- It is clear that the petitioning and balloting system put in place by the School Standards and Framework Act will not result in an end to selection. Not only are there the complex requirements for huge petitions; unfairnesses in the eligibility to vote and virtual silencing of education professionals and the Government, but, crucially there are no plans for a comprehensive system for which local campaigners can campaign. So 'better the devil you know' arguments hold sway. Meanwhile the cost of gathering information to provide parental lists in order for petitions to be gathered has so far resulted in public spending of £1,102,945 since 1999.
- All schools which have a specialism may select 10% of their intake on 'aptitude' for specified subjects. No definition of, or procedure for, selection by aptitude distinguishes it reliably from selection by 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.'
- The Select Committee report quotes research by West and Hind at the London School of Economics, which found that some schools selecting on aptitude were, in reality, selecting on ability or attainment. The research also found covert selection by unfair admission criteria in a significant minority of secondary schools which are their own admission authorities.
- There has been much criticism of the specialist school programme in that it is divisive, funding some schools more than others. The Government has attempted to meet this criticism by proposing all schools will be eligible, although this will take many years. Researchers at Sheffield Hallam University, who have worked on school admissions, have concluded:
'Specialist school status in itself does not lead to a change in the intake of a school relative to other schools in the area. The use of the option to select does.'

A suggested resolution for your local union branch or Labour Party meeting

- Send the resolution to the Policy Unit, The Labour Party, 16 Old Queen Street, London SW1H 9HP or email to education@new.labour.org.uk by October 2nd 2003.
- Let *Comprehensive Future* (address overleaf) know of your support.

(..... Labour Party/TU branch) supports the aim of Comprehensive Future to end selection for secondary education by ability or aptitude.

The Labour Party consultation document 'The Best Education for All' asks how we can ensure the principles and strengths of a comprehensive system are reflected in a more diverse system.

These principles and strengths can only be upheld if selection by ability and aptitude is ended. Even after six years of Labour government many children across England face selection tests to decide entry to secondary education. Selection labels children as failures at an early age. Selection for the few means rejection for the many. Selection divides schools, families and communities. Selection lowers standards overall. So (..... Labour Party/TU branch) calls on the Labour Party to end selection.

Wales and Scotland have successful comprehensive systems. 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.