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## Pressure grows to bring in more grammars

Whether it is the BBC's *You and Yours* programme inviting callers to let them know how they benefitted from going to a grammar school, *The Times* poll saying parents want more grammars or Tory MPs lobbying for more grammar schools to be in the next manifesto, there is no doubt that pressure for even more grammar schools is in the news. But what has happened is that, indeed, all publicity is good publicity because what has emerged as a result is more and more evidence of why selection is a bad idea!

On *You and Yours*, despite repeated requests for listeners to call in about why they did so well going to grammars, the majority of callers talked about why failing children at 11 is not the best way forward. *The Times* poll is clear that opening more grammar schools would be unpopular with most younger voters; only 29% of adults aged 18-24 wanted to see more, compared with 51% of over 60 year olds.

In response to the Conservative Voice campaign *More grammar schools*, Jonathan Simons of Policy Exchange, which lobbies 'for better public services, a stronger society and a more dynamic economy', published a five-point response. 'One of the most heartening developments over the past decade has been a cross party focus on how best we can raise performance and close the gap. Such an approach is grounded in evidence – from high performing countries across the world, and also from the best schools in this country – which shows that only by focusing efforts on raising standards for all, rather than offering solutions or escapes for a few, can we achieve the scale of improvement across the system which changes lives.'

As they go on to say, any benefits to those selected are entirely offset by those failing. They quote the evidence that pay gaps in selective areas show that 'grammar schools entrench social division, rather than solve it', grammar schools take far fewer poor pupils and grammars didn't help the poor in the past. For example, a third of pupils from the most deprived backgrounds in grammars left without a single O-level and fewer than 0.3% of pupils leaving with two A-levels were from the unskilled working class.

On the BBC *Today* programme and in the online publication *Sec Ed*, Professor Chris Husbands of the Institute of Education made clear that the evidence is against calls for more grammars. He quoted the huge disparity in the proportions of children eligible for free school meals, that tests cannot reliably discriminate between those who are academically able and those who are not, that it is not possible to test for academic ability at age 11 in a way which is valid – i.e. a test which is strongly predictive of performance later – and that it is not possible to design tests which reflect academic ability and nothing else, such as socio-economic status.

Professor Stephen Gorard, writing in a new Demos pamphlet *A Tale of two classrooms* about how to reduce inequality in education, says: 'A national school system, intended to have mixed intakes, should be comprehensive in nature, and without curricular specialisation, religious identity, and financial or academic selection. The same admissions criteria should apply to every school. Schools should not select by attainment or aptitude, student background or faith.'

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### Steering group for 2014-2015

Following the AGM, the *Comprehensive Future* steering group is now:

**Chair** – Melissa Benn, **Vice Chair** – Fiona Millar, **Secretary** – Margaret Tulloch, **Treasurer** – Michael Sterne.

**Group members** – Nic Dakin MP, George Deacon, Janet Dobson, John Edmonds, Adrian Elliott, Marlene Ellis, John Fowler, Alan Gurbutt, Richard Harris, Paul Holmes, Ian Mearns MP, Katy Simmons, Chris Storr, Richy Thompson, Beverley Wong.

# Time to write to your PPC about our manifesto aims

By now many constituency parties have chosen their parliamentary candidates. Please contact them about our manifesto aims: –

- A wide ranging review of secondary school admissions should be commissioned by Government. This should be an objective study which reviews current practice and provides an informed basis for future policy, so that the system can be fair and beneficial to all. *Comprehensive Future* proposed this in 2012 and it was supported by CASE, SEA, IPPR and Compass.

- Legislation should be introduced to end selection on ability and aptitude. This can be done gradually starting with Year 7. No school need close. No staff need change their jobs. No child's education need be disrupted and all schools would be comprehensive in a few years.

- The School Admissions Code should apply equally to all schools regardless of their status. The introduction of banding should be a local decision, include all schools in the area and the test should take place in the primary schools. Banding across the local area profile must be used rather than across those applying to the school. *Comprehensive Future* welcomes the adoption by some faith schools of an open admissions policy which welcomes all children regardless of faith.

- Local authorities should be supported as the middle tier in between schools and national government ensuring fair admissions. They have democratic legitimacy and local accessibility. All local authorities should fulfil their responsibility in ensuring fair school admissions. Local authorities should be encouraged and funded to carry out their existing duties to the highest standard – to ensure fair access, challenge all local schools to have lawful admission arrangements, and provide clear information for parents. The local authorities' role should be extended by giving them a new statutory duty to manage school admissions in all local schools, so that they would make the decision about whether applicants meet the schools' admissions criteria. This would ease the burden on schools and make the process more open. Local authorities should manage the appeals for all local schools. The duty to provide a local forum involving stakeholders to consider school admissions should be reinstated and supported. Admission Forums should agree the admission criteria for all local schools.

- The regulation of admissions and appeals to be the same for all schools whether academies or maintained. There should be strengthened national monitoring of admissions by extending the powers of the adjudicator to be able to make changes directly rather than merely comment on breaches of the Code. Information should be published by central government comparing each school's intake to those who applied and those who live locally.

More information on our website.

## Some ways you can help us

Can we send this by email? Can you do a banker's order? Changed your email? Do you live in an area where there are fully selective schools?

We know that many supporters appreciate a printed newsletter but if you are happy to have the next one by email please let us know. It does save costs. We are really grateful to the many supporters who have taken out a banker's order. Regular funding like this helps enormously. A form can be downloaded from the 'support us' section on the website.

From time to time we email all supporters for whom we have an email address. Usually a few bounce back; if you have changed your email do let us know.

There are grammar schools in 36 of the 152 local authority areas. An email network of supporters in these areas has been set up to share information. If you would like to join it please email us.

## Tristram Hunt MP outlines Labour's plans at AGM

*Comprehensive Future* supporters were pleased to welcome Tristram Hunt, Shadow Secretary of State for Education, to our recent AGM.

He outlined what a Labour government would do, including more support for early years, encouraging excellent vocational education and ensuring every child has a qualified teacher.

When questioned on selection and admissions his answers did not reassure! He gave no commitment on ending selection but did concede that admissions need looking at.

We will be writing to him in the hope of being able to explore these latter two issues further.

## Monitoring of faith school admissions

In September the Accord coalition called for all state schools to come into line with the system under which religious Free Schools operate, limiting the number of children that can be selected on the grounds of their faith to 50% of the annual intake.

At the AGM, to clarify *Comprehensive Future's* position on faith school admissions, supporters agreed that 'As in the case of all other publicly-funded schools, *Comprehensive Future* will monitor faith school admissions and draw attention to policies which appear to discriminate against the less advantaged or lower-achievers.'

## Labour conference fringe meeting

There was standing room only at our fringe meeting in Manchester in September, showing the support that comprehensive education has.

Speaking on *Is the Future Comprehensive? Schools for One Nation* Simon Barrow (co-Director of Ekklesia, on behalf of the Accord Coalition), Owen Jones (*Guardian* journalist), Patsy Kane (Executive Head of multi-academy co-operative trust of two Manchester secondary schools) and Fiona Millar (*Comprehensive Future* and *Guardian* journalist) called on Labour to support comprehensive education and end selection.

See our website for a report.