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More selection in prospect – the debate takes off

After 13 years of campaigning to end selection perhaps *Comprehensive Future* supporters should welcome the debate ensuing from the prospect of more grammar schools. At least the arguments against are getting pretty well aired.

It became clear we had been premature in welcoming the appointment of Justine Greening as the first comprehensively educated Tory Secretary of State for Education when she declared herself open-minded on having more grammars. Then Theresa May's reputation among some of us as a good listener took a bashing when No 10 did not deny the proposal.

Clearly the Prime Minister is not listening to the overwhelming evidence that the gap she is hoping to narrow is widened by selection.

England does not have a comprehensive education system. Education Datalab has shown there are very few areas in England which are not affected by selection. The rumour is that it is to be hardworking families with poor, bright children in some urban areas who are to be offered grammar schools. This will be done by setting up selective free schools where parents want them.

It seems the lobbying by the Sutton Trust to enable more poor children to get into grammars is working. Some argue that polls show parents want the "choice" of grammars but polls are misleading; often they are not exclusively of parents and never ask whether parents want their child to have to take a test to decide whether they can get into certain schools or whether all schools should accept everyone. After all, John Major did not win on the idea of a grammar school in every town.

So there is a job to do in the Autumn. The TES advises that we need to take a leaf out of the Brexit campaign and make the undoubted emotional argument against selection, if the overwhelming data against (such as that to be found on our website, Ending Selection the Evidence) is not convincing the decision makers. The rumour is that any proposal will be tacked on to an Education Bill, which might make it difficult for Tory MPs to oppose.

But selection is a system built on failure. Education in the 21st century must be about opening doors not closing them.

Roy Hattersley pays tribute to Lord Peston

Maurice Peston, a founder supporter of *Comprehensive Future*, died in April, after our last newsletter was published. Roy Hattersley said in his obituary in the *Guardian*: "Education, particularly the promotion of the comprehensive principle, had always been at the heart of his political philosophy. For years, he and Helen, his wife, campaigned for an end to secondary selection in London." Along with the late Lady David in the Lords, Maurice Peston gave strong support to the setting up of *Comprehensive Future*, for which we remain very grateful.

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Urgent – please support us now

For 13 years the administration and work of *Comprehensive Future* has been done by volunteers.

Now the threat of even more selection and unfair admissions means that our work must expand. We are fundraising for paid support. We aim to raise funds to recruit a paid worker for three years. Soon a major fundraising exercise will be launched on the website. In the meantime please send what you can to *Comprehensive Future*, PO Box 3176, Mitcham CR4 9DR or download a standing order form from our website and send it to your bank.

Some facts about grammar schools

- There are 163 grammar schools in England spread across 36 of the 152 local authorities. There are no grammar schools in Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland still has a selective system.
- Labour's School Standards and Framework Act 1998 set out which schools were grammars and introduced legislation to allow ballots to require grammar schools to admit children of all abilities. The Act also allowed existing partial selection on ability to remain and set out which "aptitudes" could be selected for.
- Petitions of eligible parents were needed to trigger a ballot. For some fully-selective areas, such as Kent, all parents would be eligible but in others it was only parents of children attending feeder schools. In Ripon in 2000 there was a ballot in the hope of requiring Ripon Grammar School to have an all-ability intake. The ballot was lost but it succeeded in showing the huge complexities and unfairness of the regulations, particularly for feeder school ballots.
- There are several Catholic grammar schools in England but in NI the Catholic Church supports an end to selection.
- Some schools called grammar are comprehensives – for example Ilkley Grammar School is a comprehensive academy. Many of the state boarding schools are grammar schools.
- Concern has been expressed recently about educational standards in seaside areas but this rarely focuses on the fact that several seaside local authorities have selection – including Bournemouth, Essex, Kent, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Medway, Plymouth, Poole, Southend, Torbay and Wirral.
- The effects of selection spread far wider than the quarter or so local authorities with grammar schools. This was noted by Professor Robert Coe some years ago and now Education Datalab has shown how the effect of selection goes far wider than the local authorities with grammar schools: <http://educationdatalab.org.uk/2016/08/grammar-schools-contaminate-comprehensive-schooling-areas/>
- The local authority with the widest gap in attainment between the rich and poor is selective Buckinghamshire.
- Fewer than 3% of entrants to grammar schools are entitled to free school meals, whereas almost 13% of entrants come from outside the state sector, largely believed to be prep schools, according to the Sutton Trust.

Diary dates

Notice of Comprehensive Future AGM

November 23rd, 6pm, Committee Room 6, House of Commons.

Guest speaker, Vic Goddard, Head-teacher Passmores Academy Harlow, the school featured in C4's *Educating Essex* in 2011.

Caroline Benn Lecture

Danny Dorling, Oxford Professor of Human Geography, who has written extensively on inequality, housing and education. November 15th, 6pm, House of Commons; details soon on the Socialist Education Association website. You will need to book.

Nominations to steering group and resolutions

Nominations are now invited to the elections to the steering group, which will be held at the AGM. You can nominate yourself. The steering group meets in London.

Please send any nominations for the steering group, including chair, vice chairs, secretary and treasurer, with a short personal statement (no more than 150 words) and any resolutions by email to [Comprehensive Future](mailto:ComprehensiveFuture@info.comprehensivefuture.org.uk) at info@comprehensivefuture.org.uk or by post to *Comprehensive Future*, PO Box 3176, Mitcham CR4 9DR to arrive by November 2nd.

More support for taking decisions on admissions away from schools

Writing in the *Times Educational Supplement* on August 12th, Jonathan Simons of the right-of-centre think tank Policy Exchange said: "It's often claimed that those of us who could be deemed as being on the centre right don't like admissions discussions and think it's a curtailment on school autonomy. But, as I've consistently argued – including to my fellow travellers in the Fabian Society and at the campaign group *Comprehensive Future* – the reason I'm in favour of a fair admissions system is precisely because I'm in favour of school autonomy, choice, and competition . . . The White Paper proposes that academies should set new relationships with their local government. But I'd go one step further than what the Government has set out and remove power over all admissions – not just in-year admissions – from academies. That, to me, is how you balance local oversight of the rules of the game, while maximising autonomy for the players within it."

Recent research from the LSE by Professor Anne West and Audrey Hind (LSE, *Clare Market Paper*, 20 May 2016) provides evidence for the need for this change. Their research looked at secondary school admissions in London from 2001 to 2015 and they express concern about the increasing complexity for parents as more and more schools become admission authorities.

Do you live or work in these local authorities?

We are keen to compile as much evidence as possible by early September on the effect of selection across the country. We have evidence from a few areas with grammar schools but need more. Do you live or work in any of these LAs: – Barnet, Bexley, Bournemouth, Bromley, Calderdale, Cumbria, Enfield, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kingston upon Thames, Kirklees, Lancashire, Liverpool, Medway, North Yorkshire, Plymouth, Poole, Redbridge, Slough, Southend, Stoke on Trent, Sutton, Telford and the Wrekin, Torbay, Trafford, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Wirral and Wolverhampton?

Do you have data on the effect of selection there and/or could you write a short article (up to 500 words) about the effect of selection in your area? If so could you please email it to both Rebecca Hickman (becks_hickman@hotmail.com) and Melissa Benn (mbenn@dircon.co.uk) as soon as possible?