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Fiona Millar

**Vice Chair**

Paul Holmes MP

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Margaret Tulloch

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## Ending rejection at 11 plus – pamphlet sets out how

With this newsletter is our latest pamphlet, which we want to publicise as much as possible. It is intended to provoke discussion about how selection could be phased out over the next few years. It aims to show that selection could be ended; what is needed is political courage. It is a joint effort by many people and is intended to be a constructive contribution to public debate in the run up to the General Election. It is being sent to MPs, education organisations, local authorities and schools in selective areas and the media. It is available on the website – [www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk](http://www.comprehensivefuture.org.uk). We are very grateful to the NUT for helping with some of the costs of distribution. Please do all you can to publicise the pamphlet.

### Fringe at the Labour Party conference

Last year we were at the Tory conference, the year before at the Liberal Democrats, so this year we are at the Labour conference. The theme is *Ending rejection at 11 plus* and the meeting takes place on Tuesday 29 September at 5.45pm in the Lowy Suite, Brighton Best Western, Brighton (on the seafront opposite West Pier).

As part of the launch of the pamphlet our fringe will be based on it. The meeting will be chaired by Fiona Millar. Speakers will be:

- Melissa Benn, journalist and *Comprehensive Future* steering group member;
- Vanessa Everett, Headteacher, Mascalls School, Kent;
- Aaron Porter, Vice President, NUS.

This meeting is outside the security area, so please come to Brighton!

### AGM and parliamentary seminar

We have arranged a parliamentary launch of the pamphlet *Ending rejection at 11 plus* in Committee Room 5 at the House of Commons on Tuesday 20 October at 7pm. All MPs will be invited. It will be chaired by our Vice Chair, Paul Holmes, Liberal Democrat MP for Chesterfield. Speakers from the selective areas have been invited. As an experiment we are not holding a Saturday AGM this year. Instead we will hold our AGM before this seminar at 6pm so that members can come to the AGM and then stay for the seminar. Please allow time to go through security.

Please send any nominations for the steering group, including chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer, with a short personal statement (no more than 75 words) and any resolutions to Margaret Tulloch at *Comprehensive Future* by 29 September.

### Forthcoming legislation and 21st century schools

One of the proposals in the White Paper *Building a 21st century schools system* is to give a new duty on local authorities to consult parents about the schools 'choices' available to them in the area. There will be a new legal requirement on local authorities to survey parents as they apply to secondary schools for their children. Local authorities will ask parents if they are satisfied with the quality and range of provision they are able to 'choose' from. If a sufficient proportion of parents is dissatisfied with the provision on offer, the Government proposes that the local authority should consult parents about specific concerns and work with them to improve the choice, range, governance and type of locally available schools and set out a plan. Parents unhappy with the plan can appeal to the Adjudicator.

The legislation to implement this will be an Improving Schools and Safeguarding Children Bill, which is listed in the draft legislative programme in *Building Britain's Future*. (*Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*. The Stationery Office, Cm 7588, June 2009.)

# Making the comprehensive case – again

For various reasons recent months have seen the need to counter claims that we should bring back even more selection.

## The Spectator Debate

Our chair, Fiona Millar, spoke on 23 June at the debate 'Grammars are best'. Speakers 'for' were Graham Brady MP, Stephen Pollard and David Davis MP; 'against' were Charles Clarke, Simon Jenkins and Fiona. A poll of the audience was taken before and after. Before there were 175 for the motion, 37 against and four don't know. After the debate 179 voted for, 84 against and four don't know. So, as the Chair (Andrew Neil) acknowledged, the speakers against won the argument and the others the numbers.

Since the event was sponsored by the National Grammar Schools Association and the audience was full of their supporters this was an excellent result. As usual the speakers 'for' relied on personal anecdote, comparisons with Northern Ireland, dodgy local authority comparisons, selection by postcode, social mobility for the working class, conflating 'progressive' teaching with the shift to comprehensive schools, comparisons with Germany (ignoring PISA) and Oxbridge entry.

However Fiona was able to quote from a useful paper from the House of Commons library which shows that the proportion of state school pupils at Oxbridge did not decline as a result of the introduction of comprehensive education. What has to be taken into account is that direct grant schools were counted as state schools, although largely fee paying.

(Standard note SN/SG/616, [www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsg-00616.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsg-00616.pdf))

## Fair Access to the Professions

The report from the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, published in July, gave rise again to calls to bring back grammar schools, although the report itself made no mention of this. The *Independent* had articles by Mary Warnock and Dominic Lawson while the BBC in its Sunday programme, *Big Questions*, arranged a debate on grammar schools as a route to increased social mobility.

Thanks in particular to Professors Richard Pring and Sally Tomlinson and other *Comprehensive Future*

supporters this meant that there was an opportunity to counter the myth that grammar schools gave an opportunity to working class children to reach the top. In fact the Crowther Report in 1959 showed that only about 10% of working class children went to grammar schools and 40% left with no qualifications.

(*Unleashing Aspirations*. The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions. Cabinet Office, Admiralty Arch, The Mall, London SW1A 2WH Telephone: 020 7276 1234; Email: [access.professions@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:access.professions@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk) Web: [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/accessprofessions](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/accessprofessions))

## Times Educational Supplement

An editorial in the TES (3.7.2009) calling for an end to selection provoked an article by Stephen Pollard, (10 3. 2009), again making the false claim that most European countries are selective. Again excellent points were made in response in the following issue (17.7.2009), including a letter from Adrian Elliott, author of *State Schools Since the 1950s*, the *Good News* ([www.tes.co.uk/publications.aspx?navcode=91](http://www.tes.co.uk/publications.aspx?navcode=91)).

## A few more points

- Only Austria, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands have selective systems, some based in part on parental choice. Some others have selection/specialisation for post-compulsory school ages.
- Finland does best in international comparisons and is comprehensive.
- Scotland is fully comprehensive and does better than Northern Ireland. For example, there are more adults with qualifications in Scotland than in NI. (DfES 2006).
- 4.9% of English children are in grammar schools (Parliamentary Question 24.6.2009) so if we assume three times this number 'failed' the test then almost 15% of young people are affected by rejection at age 10 or 11.
- Some reports of surveys do not give the full picture. A survey for the Centre for Policy Studies in 2006 was reported as support for selection but in fact only 36% supported selection and 51% said children should be taught with others in mixed ability schools.
- The LSE report (2005) which has given rise to concerns that social mobility has fallen makes the point that social mobility is better in Scandinavian countries, which are of course comprehensive.

## Ask your LA for its report

Local authorities have to submit a report by June each year to the Schools Adjudicator on the admission arrangements for all maintained schools, academies and CTCs in their areas stating the extent to which they comply with admissions legislation and the Schools Admissions Code. This will form the basis of a report to the Secretary of State on admissions across the country.

Can you get a copy? Is it on your LA website?

Also your local admission forum might have sent a report. An FOI request should work if you are not able to get the report. We would like to see them.

## Our website

Our webmaster Brian Tomlinson has done extensive work on the website. There is now a lot more information. Please visit it. We would like your comments.

If you are on Facebook there is now

a *Comprehensive Future* Facebook group.

## Donations are urgently needed!

The production of our latest pamphlet has almost cleared out our bank account.

We rely entirely on donations and on everyone volunteering their work. Please send cheques payable to *Comprehensive Future*, or take out a standing order by downloading a form from the website.