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DfE plumbs new depths in schools 'consultation'

Many of those filling in the consultation on "schools that work for everyone" have been shocked at the biased nature of the questions, which assume support for the policy of introducing more selection. As one *Comprehensive Future* supporter put it: "I have responded to the 'when did you stop beating your wife' consultation."

However, that is not the only way the DfE seems to have tried to influence responses. A tweet in November from the DfE, which said "70% of white, working class boys from grammars go to uni vs 54% from comprehensives. What do you think about grammars?" had to be removed the next day when the DfE press office was reprimanded by the UK Statistics Authority. The Authority pointed out that the DfE did not have information on who was working class and comparing selective and comprehensive schools was not comparing like with like.

Not long afterwards, another tweet, "Selective schools are almost 50% more popular than non-selective schools when comparing a parent's first preference for their child" drew criticism from Lord Lucas, who tweeted that the 50% statistic was "untruthful, misleading and a stain on [the DfE's] reputation". As he said, if grammar schools were introduced in a community, then parents were likely to opt for them over secondary moderns. But this did not mean parents wanted selection if given a choice.

Evidence that Government has got it wrong

Since the Government launched its consultation in September about, among other proposals, the aim for more grammar schools there has been a really welcome surge in academic papers showing why this is a bad idea. The Education Policy Institute, in September, challenged the idea that selection helps social mobility and, in December, that the government proposals could work.

Even the Sutton Trust, which the Government has quoted in support of its policy, said: "Attainment in GCSEs is higher in grammars than comprehensives, for both disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils. However, much of this is attributable to high levels of prior attainment of the pupils entering grammars. Highly able pupils achieve just as well in top comprehensives as they do in grammar schools."

It went on to call for funding for highly able students in all schools and, as it has done before, for more access for poor pupils to existing grammars "before any expansion in the number of grammar schools". Education Datalab has done a great deal of analysis

continued overleaf

**Comprehensive
Future**

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CF is looking for a Campaign Support Officer

The post will provide a full campaign and administration resource to the group, 21 hours per week, c £18,000. It is a stand-alone role and would suit someone with a passion for promoting comprehensive and inclusive education. You would need to be a real self-starter and will have a lot of freedom to create and run appropriate campaigns.

Closing date, Tuesday 3 January 2017.

Job description on the website at <http://comprehensivefuture.org.uk/campaign-support-officer/>

Interviews, date to be advised, but after 10 January 2017 (central London venue).

Applicants should send a CV and covering letter, explaining how they meet the requirements of the post.

To submit an application please email info@comprehensivefuture.org.uk

Asking the wrong questions, ignoring the right answers

What we said to the DfE on 'Schools that work for everyone'

Here are some of the points we made – our full response is on the website at: <http://comprehensivefuture.org.uk/comprehensive-future-responds-to-the-green-paper/>

The most striking feature of this consultation is the skewed manner in which it poses its questions. At no point does the Government enquire whether respondents agree with its plans to reverse decades of accepted policy and practice on selection. Instead, it simply assumes that the public and profession will agree with its fundamental premise and thus only asks them to offer support and furnish further ideas in order to implement these.

Since its inception, comprehensive education has proved a resounding success, providing millions of young people with the chance to gain key qualifications and move on to further study.

Comprehensive Future believes this is not just a backward-looking step but runs counter to the very interests of those children, chiefly those from families on low incomes, that the Government claims it wants to help. The questions asked fail to address the real challenges facing our education system. Most educational experts, nationally and internationally, agree that the way to raise the overall performance of England's pupils, and particularly that of disadvantaged students, is to concentrate on improvements in all schools.

Selection should be phased out of the English education system entirely. The way to improve school quality is not to further divide children – or neighbourhoods or entire counties – using unreliable methods of assessment of so-called ability but to invest in high-quality comprehensive education. Funds that are currently earmarked for expansion of selective education, approximately £50 million a year, would be far better spent increasing the recruitment of teachers and school leaders, ensuring there are sufficient school places, reducing class sizes and reforming the 14-19 curriculum to ensure a broad and stimulating education for all.

The expansion of selective school places will inevitably have a damaging effect on the quality of non-selective places. We should instead be looking at how all schools can improve. For this, Government should increase funding to areas that need them most (without penalising other areas), concentrate on recruiting the best qualified teachers, particularly to poorer neighbourhoods and schools, and foster collaboration, not competition, between local schools.

If these proposals are put in place, they will exacerbate the divide between non-selective and selective state schools, entrench the division between "academic" and "vocational" areas of the curriculum, lead to greater inequalities of educational opportunity, income and wealth, intensify current levels of social division and alienation and lead to lower overall levels of national attainment.

For all these reasons, *Comprehensive Future* believes this is a deeply flawed policy that should be set aside immediately if the Government is sincerely and seriously concerned to create, and sustain, schools that work for everyone.

Comprehensive Future steering group 2016-17

The following were elected at the AGM in November:

Chair – Melissa Benn; **Vice Chair** – Becks Hickman; **Vice Chair** - John Edmonds; **Treasurer** - Adrian Elliott; **Secretary** – Joanne Bartley. **Members** – Nuala Burgess, David Chaytor, Camilla Child, Pip Doran, Marlene Ellis, John Fowler, Richard Harris, Margaret Majumdar, Fiona Millar, Nick Kennard, Michael Pavey, Peter Prior, Jo Smith, Chris Storr, Richy Thompson.

In December, the following were coopted: Neal Skipper, Elliot Kime and Ian Mearns MP. Gawain Little (NUT) attends as an observer.

Evidence that the Government has got it wrong

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and found, for example: "The nature of selection's zero sum game is laid bare in this graph: for one child to benefit at a grammar, another child must lose in a secondary modern."

There are many more sources of evidence; below we list a few. If the Government were to listen instead of bowing to party political incentives it would withdraw the proposal and then all we would need is for HM Opposition to commit to ending all selection if re-elected!

Evidence sources:

Education Policy Institute

<http://epi.org.uk/analysis/grammar-schools-8-conclusions-data/>
<http://epi.org.uk/report/grammar-schools-policy-options/>

Fair Education Alliance

<http://www.faireducation.org.uk/grammars/>

Sutton Trust

<http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/gaps-in-grammar/>

Institute for Fiscal Studies

<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8469>

Education datalab

<http://educationdatalab.org.uk/category/admissions/>

School Dash

<https://www.schooldash.com/blog.html#20160802>

Full Fact

<https://fullfact.org/education/>

What to watch out for on the website

Soon there will be a pay button on the home page so that you are able to make donations online. Please do – we really need your support! Cheques and bankers orders are still very welcome too.

Also, in January, watch out for the launch of a very interesting paper by Nuala Burgess commissioned by *Comprehensive Future*.

Farewell

This is the last newsletter written by me, Margaret Tulloch. *Comprehensive Future*, which I set up in 2003 with David Chaytor and the late Malcolm Horne, is going from strength to strength and is advertising for a paid worker.

Of course, like all the other *Comprehensive Future* supporters, I remain committed to the cause!