



LIBERAL DEMOCRATS IN EDUCATION



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Promoting Liberal Democrat values in education

Linking Liberal Democrats in education

Developing Liberal Democrat perspectives on education

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT HAS THE LDEA BEEN DOING?

Nigel Jones Chair, LDEA

The Liberal Democrat Education Association (LDEA) is a band of volunteers, though many of us either are, or have been, professionally involved in education. We provide a communication point for anyone in the party who is passionate about education, whether professionally involved or not. We do this in various ways.

We organise fringe meetings at party conferences, like these recent ones.

March 2019 in York:

- Youth Work, pushing for the party to campaign for youth services to be restored, remembering that party policy states these should be statutory.
- At another fringe at that same conference we heard Baroness Margaret Sharp tell us her current concerns, particularly on vocational education.

September 2018 in Brighton:

- A discussion fringe about home education, where we concluded that some tweaking of party policy wording on this was necessary.
- A discussion about the purpose of universities, led by David Howarth, Sal Jarvis and Baroness Sue Garden.

In March 2018 in Southport:

- Layla Moran MP and I led on general principles of education and in another fringe we heard from a couple of parents about experience with their children's schooling, including Justin Cooke of Ambitious for Autism charity.

We do not control policy proposals, but we play a part in developing party policy and increasingly we are being consulted when motions on other matters, such as racial inequality, and the economy, contain sections on education and skills.

The March 2018 conference featured a major education policy motion from the Federal Policy Committee. This was led by Lucy Nethsingha and some LDEA committee members were on the working group. We held our own one-day conference with Lucy in December 2017 at Oxford to discuss a draft document that led to the policy paper and the conference motion. We played a further part by submitting amendments to the motion.

In December 2018, at the request of the party's policy unit, we submitted a suggested section on education for the party's contingency manifesto for a possible general election. Recently we have assisted Layla Moran and assistants in HQ in the writing of a policy motion on funding for 16+ and lifelong learning, which hopefully will be passed at this, the Bournemouth autumn conference, September 2019.

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We are in touch with the party's Local Government Group, who have a lead person on Children and Young People. Once a year, we run a joint conference.

Last February, this was held in Oxford. Layla Moran was a key speaker, telling us her passionate concerns; it is important that we support Layla, because unlike other major parties, the Liberal Democrats do not have funds to employ plenty of professional advisors. We also heard from Dame Alison Peacock, of the newly established Chartered College of Teaching, sharing with us her concern for more support for teachers and their continuing professional development. The third speaker was David Corke from the Association of Colleges; he gave us a full picture of the scene in Further Education including finance, the national commission for its future, T levels and the new Ofsted inspection regime.



I must also mention our parliamentary education team from the House of Commons and House of Lords. They meet regularly and occasionally a few of us attend, but we try to keep in touch round the year. One of the key issues facing both schools and FE is resources for Special Education and we helped them in a consultation with teachers and parents.

If you are interested in helping us and are not a member, then do please join; we need a minimum number of members. The more we are the more we can do; our committee are not normally paid expenses, but we do have to pay for the fringe meetings and conferences that we organise.

Go to our website to find out more and to join:

<https://ldea.org.uk/join-us/>

LDEA Chair Nigel Jones with Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson Layla Moran MP

MAKING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM 'FUTURE PERFECT'

Layla Moran

The expression 'politics is broken' has never been more ubiquitous than it is at the moment. Whether it's the crowning of Boris Johnson as PM by Conservative Party members, the antisemitism crisis engulfing Labour or the Brexit impasse, it's obvious to see why.

Our education system is also broken. A severe lack of funding, a culture of over-testing and the exodus of teachers from the profession has left our schools at breaking point.

We need change, absolutely. But we all know how easily education reforms (the good as well as the bad) come and go at the whims of a (variably informed) education secretary. Any change to the way we educate in this country will cause massive disruption. So, we need to find a way to put the experts, not politicians, in a position to lead the reforms of the future, if and when they are needed.

Evidence, not political point scoring, needs to be at the heart of it all.

Many of the children born now will live into the next century – we must have a system that is future-proof, that will be able to change with the times.

That's why, in March, I launched the Future Perfect Education Commission. We need less party politics, less tinkering, and less doing things to the

profession. More consensus, more working with the profession and more radical, more pragmatic ideas are what's needed.

And I practise what I preach about political interference: I don't sit on the Commission even though I convened it, and neither does any elected politician. Jo Owen, co-founder of Teach First, has put a great deal of time and effort into getting the initiative off the ground as the Commission's chair. He has been joined by union leaders, a former head of Ofsted, the CBI, education policy experts and an ex-chair of the Education Select Committee.

A formidable team, but what's crucial is the evidence, collected from research by our partners at Warwick University but also submitted in our call to evidence, which is currently ongoing.

They would love to hear from the LDEA and its members as part of that – we need the best ideas, and a diversity of perspectives, if we are going to build a future-perfect, world-class system.

If you have any time between now and the end of August, when the call to evidence ends, please do take part. You can find out more by going to www.edcommission.org.uk.

Thank you to LDEA for their continued support as we continue to campaign to make our schools the best they can be, including on funding cuts. Let's set our sights on the future too – thank you in

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advance to all of you who will take part in the Commission's work.

Our campaign for a system that is fairer and properly funded continues. Let's work towards a different kind of politics so we can make that a reality.

Layla Moran is the Member of Parliament for Oxford West and Abingdon, and is the Lib Dem Spokesperson in the House of Commons for Education, Science and Young People.

'CINDERELLA YOU MAY GO TO THE BALL' – A LOOK AT THE AUGAR REVIEW ON POST-18 EDUCATION

Mike Storey

I had hoped that the Augar Review into post-18 education would provide an opportunity to put right, among other things the inequalities in our post education system. I am afraid, however, that a Guardian Leader summed up my own feelings about the review:

'The proposed rebalancing of the post-18 system means that FE colleges are no longer quite such poor relations'

Further Education, for so long the Cinderella of the education system, may look just a little bit better dressed, still has not been invited to the ball. The media headlines were not about the rebalancing of vocational education, they were all about the impact on universities.

It was pretty unhelpful that the message from the Spokesperson of the Russell Group Universities to our education team, ahead of publication, was that, should their income suffer, one of the likely cuts would be to outreach activities. Their budgets for increasing diversity and encouraging disadvantaged students would be one of the first to be cut. This was not a particularly helpful or thoughtful comment on the review.

Of course, the real beneficiaries of the proposed cut in fees will not be those

who take out huge loans, they will be paying even more back over the longer repayment period. The beneficiaries will be those better off students who do not need to take out a loan: they will each benefit from a cut of £4,500 over a first-degree course.

The media paid scant attention to what was said about England's 200 Further Education Colleges, which are the backbone of our vocational training provision. Our Further Education Colleges represent the essential engine to meet our growing skills gap.

Just 37% of men and 34% of women undertake post-secondary, non-tertiary education in the UK, which compares badly with the 49% of men and 44% of women across the industrialised nations of the OECD.

The Augar Review highlights the £8 billion of Government funding which universities received last year to support the 1.2 million students. This was more than three times the £2.3 billion allocated to 2.2 million full time and part time students over 18 in FE.

While the proportion of students attending universities has risen over the past decade, the number of students in all forms of Further Education has declined. In this country we have a very elitist view of education. For the privileged, all roads lead to Oxbridge, the well-off would have us believe.

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Further Education is for other people's children.

For many young people, and particularly those whose parents did not go to university, their choices at 16+ depend on the advice they receive at school. With secondary schools incentivised to direct their students into the school sixth form and then to university, many students are not even told about the vocational options or apprenticeship routes open to them.

Recently, I was talking to a colleague who became the Education Officer in a local authority 40 years ago. He told me he always made a point of looking behind the door of the Head Teacher's office when he visited a secondary school – to see if that was where the unopened box of FE College prospectuses was sitting! Is this the case, I wonder?

At an event hosted by the APPG for Apprenticeships in Parliament, every one of the seven apprentices invited to meet the group explained that they had been forced to do their own research into starting an apprenticeship. Not one of their schools had offered them any information or guidance.

Government has reminded every school that, since 2nd January 2018:

‘Every school must ensure that there is an opportunity for a range of education and training providers to access all pupils in Year 8 to Year 13

for the purpose of informing them about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. Every school must publish a policy statement setting out their arrangements for provider access and ensure that this is followed’

I struggled to find the necessary policy statement on the websites I looked at, even though a model statement is set out in the guidance. Buried on one school site was a link – from the heading “Not going to Uni” – but the link was broken.

There is, of course much in the 216-page Augar Report that Lib Dems welcome. It is encouraging to read that:

‘There is a powerful case for change in the FE sector ... which in recent years has had its ability to innovate and plan for the long term severely restricted by the funding regime.’

The Report makes some very sound proposals:

- We support the proposal for a national network of colleges, but we have to consider the impact on students in rural areas.
- We very much welcome the £1 billion Capital Investment Fund
- We support the proposal that all adults should be able to study for their first Level 2 and Level 3 qualification free of charge

- We agree that there is no case to set a lower base rate for 18-year olds in college compared with that for 16- and 17-year olds
- We agree that Level 6 Apprenticeships should only be available to those who have not undertaken a public supported degree

For me, as Vice President of the APPG for the Teaching Profession, the most important recommendation is on the Further Education workforce. With average salaries £7,000 less than in secondary schools, it is little wonder that FE Colleges struggle to recruit staff. In many of the technical areas that Further Education needs to offer as areas for study, salaries in the private sector are twice those of an FE lecturer.

For those who have missed out earlier in their education, or those who need to re-train for a new career, life-long learning is an absolute must.

It is essential that the Augar Review is implemented in full so that we can tell our FE colleagues and colleges 'you shall go to the ball'!

Mike Storey is the Lib Dem Education Spokesperson in the House of Lords.

I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING...

John Howson

As I write this article in late June, the Party's spokesperson in the House of Lords is proposing a new approach to knife crime. At the same time a policy group established by Liberal Democrats Federal Policy Committee has spent the last 12 months exploring the general issue of crime and policing and will bring its report and a motion to the 2019 Autumn Conference after a consultation session at the Spring 2019 Conference in York.

I have mentioned this fact because the process of policy-making in our Party, not least over the question of education, could be argued to be in need of rethinking. There are issues that arise in the course of time that demand immediate responses, the knife crime wave may well be one of them, and our Home Office team do seem to have taken account of the policy group's direction of travel on this matter.

But what of Augar and his Report into Further and Higher Education? I am sure that other contributors will discuss aspects of the recently published report in detail. These will no doubt include the recommendations in the report especially on tuition fees. How will our spokesperson on education respond to the suggestion to reduce fees?

The key point at issue is, how should the Party create policy in this modern age of social media and a fast-moving

world? Some things are easy and consensual: not enough cash for education. We can all sign up to that. But, even here there are nuances. FE before schools in the queue? Will the group of local authorities that feel poorly funded, known as the F40 Group, campaign for priority in the funding queue before FE? Or accept that the claims of FE are greater? Early years before higher education? And, what about education's contribution to climate change in terms of both spending and the place it holds in the curriculum? Who decides policy?

We saw at the start of the coalition government in 2010 acquiescence to the principle of creating academies to replace local authority-maintained schools proposed by the Conservatives. This approach emerged between the signing of the coalition agreement and the summer recess for parliament in 2010. This allowed Michael Gove to pilot the 2010 Academies Act through parliament in a way that might not have been possible had the subsequent motion at the Lib Dems Autumn Conference in Liverpool, that was proposed by Peter Downes, and passed enthusiastically by delegates, happened while the Bill was still on its way to gaining parliamentary approval. By completing its passage to Royal Assent before the autumn conference season, Michael Gove was able to prevent any effective political opposition to his ideas.

As I have suggested, this is not just an issue for education, but highlights the question about the extent to which the Party should take note of its membership and its activists when deciding on policy?

There is now plenty of evidence that the Party was probably on a downward trend in its fortunes from soon after the Iraq War, and the election of David Cameron as Tory leader, but the tuition fee decision and to a lesser extent the acquiescence to the downgrading the role of local authorities in education, affected our Party's success. Did these actions reduce the enthusiasm of some activists that didn't agree with either policy, and weren't mollified by the Pupil Premium and the replacement of Statements of SEN with Education and Health Care plans?

Recent political history has shown that any political party that loses contact with its activists risks long-term problems. Now, I don't have a solution to this issue, but organisations such as the LDEA can play a vital role in understanding what the membership, and especially that section of the membership actively interested in education, currently thinks about the subject. In the same way, our elected representative on the LGA can reflect the views of councillors across the country.

Finally, there is the issue of the manifesto that has moved from a broad statement of intent to a fully

costed document of commitments. Lib Dems pledge 'a penny on income tax for education' in the 1990s and many still recall that slogan. We weren't forced to implement it, but the 2010 manifesto and the tuition fee pledge cost many activists and possibly some parliamentarians their hard-won seats.

So, as we approach the 150th anniversary of state schooling, celebrated next year, what matters to you as a Party member? Climate change; Brexit, fairness and equity are probably on everyone's lists, but what about education. How education policy relates to that list matters, but are there other issues and do you feel that the Party has a mechanism for listening? Home schooling discussed last year at the Autumn Conference is an interesting case in point.

The answer, of course, is determined by what we are as Liberal Democrats and our fundamental beliefs. Education has a vital role in helping us achieve our vision for society.

Professor Cllr John Howson has been a lifelong member of the Liberal Democrats and the Parties from which it was formed. A Vice President of the LDEA, John is currently vice Chairman of Oxfordshire County Council (2019-2020) and Chairman of TeachVac – the free national vacancy service for schools and teachers. He has also served on the Party's Crime and Policing Policy Group. His long-

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*time blog about education issues
can be found at www.johnohowson.wordpress.com In his career, John has
been a teacher, lecturer, civil servant
and entrepreneur.*

WHAT HELPS PUPILS DO WELL?

Peter Downes

One of the mysteries of teaching is understanding why pupils of similar ability who have had the same teachers throughout Years 7–11 achieve very different results at GCSE. Of course, pupils are not robots so some variation could be expected but can we identify any behavioural or circumstantial variables?

That is an issue my colleagues and I grappled with when I was a Head of a very large comprehensive school. We gave all our new pupils an NFER VRQ test (this was in the era when Year 6 SATs had not been implemented). Our yearly intake of 300 gave us a database which my statistics colleagues said would be able to provide 'significant' pointers in an analysis of outcomes at 16+.

So, when the GCSE results came in, we gave all our pupils a score based on their 8 best results, converting their A-G scores into numerical outcomes giving them a score range from 56 to 0. We then plotted each pupil on a graph and drew the 'line of best fit'. About 80% of the year group fell within close proximity to the line, as could be expected.

What really interested us were those who 'over-achieved' i.e. produced better GCSE results than their VRQ score indicated and those who

'underachieved'. The results were closely scrutinised by the pastoral Heads (we had a vertical House system) who knew the pupils and their personal circumstances really well. The basic question was: do there appear to be any common factors in the 'outliers'?

Various possibilities emerged: the under-achievers (NB who were not necessarily low achievers) had a disproportionate number of boys, pupils who smoked or pupils who had experienced family break-up during their secondary school years. The over-achievers had a higher proportion of parents who were actively involved in the Parents' Association. We were firmly told by our statistics colleagues that these factors may be correlational rather than causal. We were also warned that we may simply be finding links to social class factors. In any case, these were mostly matters outside our direct control.

However, we did stumble on one factor in the over-achievers which my statistics colleagues deemed to be 'significant'. The over-achievers included an unusually high number of pupils who had taken an active part in music during their school career (though not necessarily taking it as a GCSE subject).

Our school music policy was to encourage collective music making in a range of ways – junior and senior choir, conventional orchestra, string ensembles, brass band, wind band,

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percussion ensembles and 'pop groups'. Over a third of the year group was involved to some extent in active collective music making. An unusually high proportion of them featured in the 'over-achievement' group, right across the ability range, rather more girls than boys.

We speculated on why this might be. Was it that taking part in an extra-curricular activity in school gave them a more positive attitude towards school in general? If so, would the same apply to other extra-curricular activities like sport and drama? That appeared not to be the case.

As it happens, at that time I was a member of an education group in the Royal Society of Arts and I mentioned my 'findings' to them. They decided to do a wider survey, with professional research input, and they came to similar conclusions.

What can it be about music that seems to have a beneficial effect on wider learning? Does it increase powers of concentration? Does it develop 'deferred gratification'. Does it enhance team work? Or is it simply that children from supportive (and well-off) families decide to take part in music, so what we have identified is really a social class factor rather than a specifically musical factor?

I sometimes find myself wishing that I could re-run that inquiry. From

the vantage point of retirement, my observation of secondary schools today is that music-making has declined, partly because of 'academic pressure' and partly because school funding is too squeezed to allow schools to invest teacher time and resources in extra-curricular activity.

What do you think?

Peter Downes was a secondary school head in Cambridgeshire from 1982 – 96 and President of the Secondary Heads Association (now ASCL). He is currently a Cambridgeshire County Councillor and primary school governor. He plays the viola in the local amateur orchestra!

GRAMMAR TEACHING: A LINGUIST WRITES...

Tom Barney

Successive secretaries of state for education who have emphasised, and sometimes tinkered with, the teaching of English grammar have often been motivated by embattled imaginations. They have believed standards of grammar are declining in everyday speech and writing, but this belief has been a surrogate for the belief that wider standards of civility and social conformity are also declining. Traditional grammar teaching was intended as much as anything to reverse this perceived wider decline. There was, as Deborah Cameron put it in 1995, a marriage of Dr Syntax and Mrs Grundy.

This has been condemned by those who see in the national curriculum's provisions for English grammar teaching a threat to children's imaginations and creativity in reading and writing. For example, Robert Hull in 2009 slated a number of publications of the Department for Education:

'Fundamental is the belief – unargued for in the documents, but continuously assumed, asserted and inflicted – that children learn to write by studying language and assembling techniques, rather than by – writing... The subject "English" then becomes not a spacious, democratically open and relatively common-sensible world, the language for entering which is rooted

in everyday speech... but a precious terrain guarded by an "in" list of ephemeral state-sponsored specialist terms. By requiring the study of the structure and language of poetry the National Literacy Strategy's plan for poetry... pays unambiguous homage to the cerebral and anti-creative.'

Given the narrow-minded and joyless tone of the politicians' pronouncements this is unsurprising. It is nonetheless an over-reaction. Somebody asked me recently if I knew what a 'determiner'¹ was. He did not, but his primary-age children were required to. This seemed to him a shockingly abstruse thing to inflict on them. It may possibly be too advanced for some primary children, but the very word shows that the grammar taught today is not the old-fashioned Latin-based grammar some embattled imaginations would probably prefer. The designers of the curriculum have drawn on modern linguists' descriptions of the way the language actually works. As Cameron remarks, Dr Syntax and Mrs Grundy could still get a divorce.

Language study of this kind is well worthwhile, and none of it need detract from creative work (for which time should certainly be found). It is fascinating in itself: it can include the children's own speech, language change over time or dialectal variation. So far

1 'A modifying word that determines the kind of reference a noun or noun group has, for example a, the, every.' OED

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from encouraging social conformity this illuminates and celebrates human diversity. A rich knowledge of how language is constructed can be used to counteract those commercial and mass-media interests whose all too artful use of language is intended to exploit us. It can also counteract similarly exploitative political interests, including those of the grammar purists. In short it encourages independent thinking, beyond question a Liberal project.

When it comes to the study of literature, linguistic knowledge can be used as a means of appreciating how authors construct their works and achieve their effects – how they appeal to the imagination in fact. I am tempted to say that it is the only means of doing this, for what else is a work of literature constructed from but language?

Certainly I remember how frustrating A level English was nearly 40 years ago, because we were taught no kind of critical procedure but simply left to wrestle with the set texts as we might; and what a revelation it was – but alas not until I was a postgraduate – to find that systematic linguistic analysis yielded so much about the workings of a text. It has since served me well and delighted me. It might have done so earlier.

Nowadays this kind of empirical language knowledge is built up throughout school. It can then, for those who wish it, lead to the seriously scholarly A level English language

syllabus which, far from stifling the imagination, has proved very popular and has enthused so many young people.

Tom Barney is treasurer of LDEA. He took a degree in linguistics to escape from school subjects, continued it at postgraduate level and has since taught it in higher education.

THE LINK BETWEEN INEQUALITY AND EDUCATION: A VITAL PARTY ISSUE

Nigel Jones

In April this year the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) presented its annual report to Government, saying:

'Inequality is now entrenched in Britain from birth to work and the Government needs to take urgent action to help close the privilege gap.'

I think the concept of social mobility is inadequate on its own, but this is one example of good points being made under that heading.

In June this year, a joint report (funded by the Nuffield Foundation and referred to below as the NUFFIELD report, nuffieldfoundation.org/news/school) from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research with the University of London Institute of Education, said 'School reforms have not bridged gaps in pupils' attainment levels'.

In their report in August 2017, the Education Policy Institute (EPI) said that since 2007 the gap had widened with the most disadvantaged being more than two full years on average behind their peers. There has been some improvement as measured by exam results, but at current rate of progress it would take 50 years or more to close the gap. In July 2018 the EPI said 'Overall there is little change in the gap in school attainment between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.'

Where there appeared to be recent progress, evidence suggests this is due to a change in the accountability system rather than actual improvement in pupil performance.

When the Liberal Democrats presented their policy paper on Education to the Spring conference in 2018, it highlighted this issue and made a number of fundamental proposals for change. However, I think yet more needs to be said and done.

The latest SMC report recommends extending the provision of 30-hour childcare offer to include those working only eight hours a week instead of the current 16 and 'Government should ensure the investment in the home learning environment reaches disadvantaged and vulnerable families'. It is already well known that the early years are crucial and that the gap which starts there becomes progressively wider. The EPI has discovered that gap has started to get wider now at 16+, with less disadvantaged students pursuing good quality education at that age. So, it is interesting that two recommendations of the SMC report are to significantly raise funding for all the 16-19 education and introduce a pupil premium for that age group.

The NUFFIELD report confirms what many have thought about the school reforms of recent years having little effect on inequality of achievement. It considers school management reform.

Overall school performance (including financial, which in the current crisis is very important) is better where middle managers are given a high key role, though with appropriate senior team interventions and where there is more intensive provision of training. In contrast with other employment sectors, the increased use of performance-related pay and performance monitoring are ineffective in schools. More intensive use of a school's human resources does little to tackle teacher turnover, is linked to higher illness rates and is not associated with higher pupil attainment. Also across the country as a whole, there is no impact on attainment of a change in Head Teacher.

My experience as a governor assisting with exclusions confirms that the current academic curriculum is part of the problem. Dr Simon Edwards of Portsmouth University (a specialist in young people with challenging behaviour) says (Times Educational Supplement, 12 July 2019) it is the fault of systemic issues dictated by education policy at a governmental level, continuing to push a conveyor belt style and not constructively dealing with the disengagement of many youngsters. He adds that a child's behaviour in the classroom cannot be disassociated from family background. That sounds obvious, but is it taken seriously in public policy?

What goes on outside the school matters. In 2013 a report by RISE (Research and Information on State Education) said that only 20% of the differences in achievement in school was accountable by factors in the school. This year's NUFFIELD report says, 'Schools account for a relatively small share of the variation in pupil attainment not usually more than 10%' and, 'attending a "good" secondary school only adds a small amount more value than attending a "bad" secondary school' and, 'there appears to be more scope to influence pupil attainment through interventions targeted away from schools' That is not to say that more could not be done by schools if they had the resources. Yet, it is also known that youth services, parents and investment in early years care are major factors.

As to parents, it depends on how capable they are; research on children in care (summed up by the Local Government Information Unit in 2016) shows that the sooner children are removed from dysfunctional families the more effective will be the help provided by carers and schools.

My conclusion is that we need more investment in a range of local public services for families and communities, especially early years care, youth services, disadvantaged families and those with special needs. Our schools need more resources and a change in culture, especially for a more flexible

curriculum and improved provision both in early years and at 16+ particularly for the less academic approaches to learning. In all areas, more support and training of professionals is vital. At the moment this is not happening and we need to be pushing these points in party campaigns. We must recognise also the difference between political direction with provision of resources and political interference; effective change has to happen from within our communities and institutions.

Nigel Jones is Chair of the LDEA. He was a Councillor for 13 years until 2015. He is retired after 42 years as a teacher in schools and FE colleges and is a school governor.

SCHOOLS OF SANCTUARY – WHAT, WHY AND HOW?

Clare Campion Smith

Bristol signed the City of Sanctuary charter in 2011 when the Lib Dems ran the administration and Barbara Janke was Leader of Council – heady days!

It is fine having a title but how do you turn the aspiration of being a welcoming city into a reality? One strand of that work is education and in Bristol we currently have Schools and Colleges of Sanctuary and we are looking to expand that network

A school/college of sanctuary commits to being a safe and welcoming place for people whose lives were in danger in their own country. The schools/colleges work with students, staff, governors and the wider community to understand what it means to leave home and country in fear and to seek safety in an unknown country and a different culture. The scheme is about understanding and empathy, practical support and welcome for students and their families and it seeks to embed a culture of inclusion.

There are the inevitable criteria to be met and evidenced. The programme is very flexible and the work can be delivered via PSHE, through one-off events such as Refugee Week, using the UNICEF rights of the child focus and just generally woven into the curriculum. Schools/colleges submit a folder of evidence and are awarded a certificate for their work

What is encouraging is that schools are approaching us from parts of the city which have always been considered white and working class as well as from the more obvious multi-cultural areas of the city. Cities change quite quickly sometimes, perceptions more slowly but this programme adapts to all circumstances.

There are three simple principles:

- **Learn** what it means to be seeking sanctuary,
- **Embed** concepts of welcome, safety and inclusion, and
- **Share** your vision and achievement.

All information can be found at <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org>

And for the why we should encourage and support schools to be involved, I quote from the Chairman's report to Bristol City of Sanctuary's first AGM.

'City of Sanctuary exists to create that "Welcome" in the context of the Government policy of creating UK as a "hostile environment". This is expressed particularly in detention without crime or limit - something our legal system does not allow for terrorists! Add to this enforced destitution and the refusal of the right to work, the restrictions on Legal Aid, the inflated costs of Leave to Remain applications with their "health surcharge"; the culture of disbelief and poor decision-making

in the Home Office, the often cruel decisions by Immigration Tribunals ... and we have a catalogue of the abuse of the human rights of our sanctuary-seeking and refugee community that shames our nation and traumatises our sisters and brothers who come seeking only freedom and safety. Has the heart of our nation grown coarse? Have we lost our humanity?'

Are these the real British values that our schools are required to practise and teach? Alongside many Liberals and liberals, I believe the hostile environment is profoundly wrong. All generations must work for a better way and the Schools/Colleges of Sanctuary is one strand in our armoury.

So as teachers, governors, parents, grandparents let's encourage and support our local schools to get involved. With the new Ofsted emphasis moving away from hard results to curriculum development, this is a good time to move forward.

Clare was a Bristol city councillor for 12 years and was responsible for Children's Services from 2009 to 2012. She stood down in 2018 but continues as a trustee of City of Sanctuary and as a school governor.

THE MISSING £6,000 AND OTHER SEND FUNDING ISSUES IN BRISTOL

Merche Clark

Inclusion of SEND children in our mainstream schools, where possible, has long been held as an important tenant in our education system. However, with ever increasing financial pressures and without a serious injection of proper and adequate funding, our system will fail all our mainstream pupils. Resources are having to be spent on the statutory rights of SEND children and, by necessity, these resources are being taken from mainstream class colleagues.

Mainstream school funding assumes £4,000 per pupil per year. Bristol City Council takes the allocation and sets an APWU (Average Pupil Weighted Unit—just under £3,000) and then using a formula which takes into account deprivation index, English as a second language and other adjustments spreads out some of the remainder of the pot. For the primary school where I'm a Governor this is around £500 per pupil. So funding comes in at about £3,500 per pupil per year.

There is an assumption that school delegated funding can magically generate the first £10,000 of high needs provision. That's £4000 per pupil (which, remember, is actually £3500) plus £6,000 SEND. But this £6,000 does not exist. It does for Special Schools or Commission Resource

Units, where schools receive £6000 per place whether or not the place is filled (nowadays its more than likely to be filled), but not for mainstream schools. The school has to use money from its delegated funding to cover the £6,000. It is imperative that mainstream schools receive £6,000 for high needs pupils in their care.

High needs children often require 1:1 supervision either to deal with their physical disabilities or their emotional or other learning needs. The cost of employing a teaching assistant is approx. £22,000 per year. Schools can apply for top-up funding (the idea that it will cover costs above the £10,000 baseline). Funding bands used to be £10,000 or £15,000 per annum. Recently the bands have been set at £1,000 or £5,000. These levels are totally inadequate, leaving school budgets covering significant shortfalls. It is imperative that top-up funding bands return to £10,000 and £15,000 levels.

As if this were not enough, the cost of preparing paperwork for submission for top-Up funding is onerous both in terms of paying for experts and SENCO time. Decisions are made by top-Up panels made up of SENCOs or more recently Head Teachers. There are significant costs in running these panels too. It is paramount that a streamlined system is established which addresses both these shortcomings.

Some ideas for this are:

- An **emergency in-year** top-up process triggered by visits and reports by Educational Psychologists and recommendation, which would not require lots of evidence (as the child has only just joined the school). This would allow schools to better support transitions over the first 12 months.
- Top up funding should be decided by a local authority professional (Educational Psychologist or SEN Team) within the **annual review meeting**, removing the need for costly top up panels.
- Both top-up applications and ECHPs to use streamlined and shared bureaucratic systems
- EHCPs should have a 3-5 year life
- Top-up funding 2-3 year life

Would this work in your local authority and your school?

Merche Clark is a primary school governor in Bristol and Treasurer of the Bristol Liberal Democrats.

WE NEED MORE INCLUSIVE FURTHER EDUCATION CURRICULA

Edmund Dean

I was introduced to one of my favourite students while cover teaching an ESOL Entry 2 class in Edgware (that's Elementary, or CEFR A2, for the rest of us). She's an Afghan refugee, and she usually wears a head scarf.

On one occasion, in a previous lesson with their usual teacher, she and her class had done some work on pronouns, but they wanted more. So we did that, and I got to use one of my favourite lessons, which introduces possessive pronouns using descriptions and pictures of people from different nationalities.

As part of the lesson, I briefly explained to the students that "they" and "them" can be used for people of indeterminate gender. As far as I'm aware, this isn't a subject most teachers teach, nor will you find it in most English language curricula. But it's important to me, so I try to teach it seamlessly alongside "she/her" and "he/him".

The singular "they" has a rich history in English – it can be found in Shakespeare and Chaucer – and English language theory has generally accepted and adopted its 21st century use for non-binary people. My class of sixteen students, most of whom were refugees, asylum seekers, and new arrivals to the UK, took to the concept quickly. My Afghan student

was especially keen – no sooner had I concept-checked the language, when she said "Like you!"

My student was remarkably astute! Yes, I am genderqueer, and yes, I do prefer they/them pronouns. Never before had I been gendered correctly so quickly. Usually it's "Sir" to the front and "Ma'am" to the back, and always "Ma'am" on the phone. Moreover, getting such a quick uptake on a concept, with a student who I might have (incorrectly) assumed might find it difficult, made my heart glow.

It's my own cultural bias that I assumed the students would find the concept difficult. In my usual class, which was dominated by Iranian secularists, some of whom were LGBT* themselves, I wouldn't have paused to launch into gender and sex topics. In this other class, which had several Arabic-speaking students, I had been less confident. In the event, I didn't need to worry.

Later in the same lesson, I provided them with a poorly-photocopied photo of a Thai person in a Songkran parade. It was very hard to see the person clearly. Most of the students, not knowing the Thai person's gender, described them using "they/them". Afterwards, when a subsequent interview with this same person used "she/her", they switched to "she/her" without any prompting. They got it!

Teachers always learn not to underestimate their students. But we're frequently let down by the ESOL curriculum, which hasn't been updated in years. Our assessment tests still feature VHS tapes and CRT monitors. General English language curriculum hasn't changed much either – even the 2019 edition of the otherwise excellent English File is drowned in heteronormativity and gender stereotypes.

The racial and cultural diversity of English language curriculum is generally good. English is a global language, and all language learning lends itself well to a global conversation. Gender and sexual diversity, however, is notably absent. Why? Things like same-sex relationships, women in stereotypically masculine jobs, and Pride Month celebrations are now commonplace in government and in the private sector. It is strange that the third sector, which is so often at the forefront of progressive social change, seems to lag behind.

If we don't have gender and sexual diversity in FE, it's small wonder that many people who haven't had this vital cultural education also want to deny it to their children, as we have seen in the recent protests in Birmingham. There's a Jesuit saying; "The parents are the primary educators of the child." This isn't a theory or a model, it's just a fact – if what you teach in school isn't reinforced at home, it becomes much,

much harder to teach. If what you teach at school is morally opposed at home, it may be impossible. This is a challenge FE teachers know well. Education has to be holistic. It doesn't stop in the classroom, and it doesn't stop at 19.

Many young parents, like my Afghan student and her peers, are very receptive to liberal ideals. They may even teach us a thing or two. The students get it. But teachers and administrators also need to play their part. If we really want to unlock the potential of FE to support a liberal, inclusive culture, then we need liberal, inclusive FE curricula. Let's have some women programmers, families with two dads, and people who use "they/ them" in the imagery and stories which provide the context to any good lesson. It's as easy as switching VHS to YouTube on our assessments.

With a little forethought and a little work towards sex and gender-inclusive FE curricula, we'd go a long way towards building that society where no-one is enslaved by conformity.

Edmund Dean is Secretary of the LDEA and is an ESOL teacher at 5E in North London

ATTAINMENT VERSUS GRADE INFLATION: WHICH STUDENTS ARE CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE?

Sal Jarvis

Universities work hard to close the attainment gap between black and minority ethnic (BAME) and white students, and between students from more and less privileged backgrounds – but it remains stubbornly wide.

The Office for Students is quite right to expect that all students, from whatever background, should be supported to access, succeed in, and progress from university successfully. The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) makes use of split metrics, which identify the perceptions, continuation rates and employment outcomes of different groups of students, to shine a light on inequalities. But the fact that there is also a TEF metric that seeks to measure and punish grade inflation gives rise to a sharp dilemma: if universities drive forward enhancements that enable more BAME and working-class students to achieve the good degree that they deserve, then the proportion of good degrees will rise, and universities will be penalised for grade inflation. In contrast, if there is no increase in the proportion of good degrees, the gaps will remain, and universities will be penalised for the inequalities.

This dilemma is sharpest for institutions such as mine, which recruit a high percentage of non-traditional students. And if the sector is not careful then, as

we navigate this minefield, somewhere, lost in the middle, is the individual student who is entitled to an excellent education that enables them to achieve their best.

The TEF is now in its fourth year and currently subject to an independent review led by Dame Shirley Pearce: to what extent will its recommendations successfully navigate the choppy waters between upholding high quality and eliminating these unjustifiable inequalities? Will the TEF ever be able to distinguish grade improvement from grade inflation?

In the face of such a complex issue, we at the University of Hertfordshire have invested time and money to develop an inclusive culture that enables all our students to succeed. We have a vibrant and diverse student body. More than half our students are from a BAME background; about 40 per cent of our students will be the first in their family to attend university; a similar percentage are not traditional 'live away from home' students, but commuters, sometimes travelling long distances to the university or managing caring responsibilities alongside study. Very many of our students – probably most – work in term time to enable them to meet their expenses. We are proud that our TEF gold award explicitly recognised our work to enable outstanding outcomes for all our students, and we continue to strive to remove the

institutional barriers that might impede their success.

We are part of an OfS-funded consortium, which is led by Kingston University and includes De Montfort University, UCL, and the universities of Greenwich and Wolverhampton. Its work makes use of Kingston's value-added metric to explore differences in degree attainment between different groups of students and to stimulate inclusive curricular changes at programme level.

And we believe that institutional change is best developed in partnership, so our staff teams work closely with our students, drawing on their experience and expertise. For example, we employ student BAME advocates – one for each of our academic schools. The activities that they lead are bespoke for each school but include holding focus groups; discussing inclusive practices; challenging assumptions and critiquing the curriculum.

Make no mistake, while we have made good progress towards our goal to eliminate the value-added gaps between different groups of students, at Hertfordshire we still have much to do. But these questions are not just questions for senior leaders in higher education institutions, nor only for course teams, but also for the government and the OfS. How can they ensure that TEF metrics can distinguish grade improvement from

grade inflation? If funding for higher education is reduced following the recommendations of the Augar review, how can the government ensure that this doesn't further widen the HE participation gap?

When policymakers settle these questions, which place some universities between a rock and a hard place, whose children will they be thinking of? Will changes to fees, funding and the TEF only benefit the already advantaged students whose education has secured high grades and places at prestigious universities? Only those students who require no cultural or other adjustments to university practices to achieve their full potential? Will policymakers be thinking of those students who may look at their lecturers and not see a single person who looks like them or has had their experiences?

None of us, whether policymakers, university leaders, or lecturers, should be satisfied until each student who comes through universities' doors is engaged and, subsequently, leaves with a high-quality degree. At the University of Hertfordshire, we are certainly not perfect, but what has worked best for us is collaboration. Can collaboration now, between the sector and the government, secure improvements? Our students are watching, and we must not fail them.

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This piece was first published in
Times Higher Education, 18 March 2019

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/attainment-versus-grade-inflation-which-students-are-caught-middle>

Sal Jarvis is pro vice-chancellor (education and student experience) at the Universtiy of Hertfordshire and (currently) vice chair of LDEA. Before joining the university, she was a primary teacher.

REPORT FROM THE LGA LIB DEM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE GROUP

Lucy Nethsingha

Following on from the Bright Futures Report² and the work by Newton which was published in July 2018 there has been a major campaign by the board and LGA more widely to get Government to recognise the scale of the funding challenge in children's social care. The number of children coming into care across the system continues to rise, (although slightly less steeply) and the costs of placements are also increasing.

During the course of this year the Newton work, looking in depth at the funding issues in children's social care, has been augmented by another major study from Isos looking at the challenges of supporting children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This was a fantastic piece of work, well worth reading, and can be found here:

<http://www.isospartnership.com/uploads/files/LGA%20HN%20report%20corrected%2020.12.18.pdf>

The report points out that costs are rising fast for providing education for young people with SEND, which combined with increasing numbers of children coming into the system is likely to lead to a deficit of between £1.2 and

£1.6 billion by 2021.

The report is also very clear in demonstrating how the key drivers for schools, both financial and in the quality judgements schools face, discourage mainstream schools from keeping SEND pupils within the mainstream system. This is likely to mean that more children than in the past are being judged by schools as not able to cope in mainstream school. While there is clearly a need for some children to be educated in special schools, the overwhelming evidence is that where children can cope with mainstream education, they do better. It is thus unhelpful for both the children concerned and for council finances if children are not encouraged and supported to remain in mainstream schools. (The report is clear that many schools do try to keep SEND pupils, but that they do this in spite of the system, not because of it.)

The National Adoption Leadership Board changed its name this year, to become the National Adoption and Special Guardianship Board (ASGB), and has focussed strongly on the pressures facing Special Guardians this year. Special Guardians (SGs) are usually adults in the same family as a child who offer to "adopt" the child. The process for becoming a Special Guardian is rather shorter and with fewer checks than for adoption, although there has been some tightening up of the

² https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Bright%20Futures%20-%20LGA%20children%27s%20social%20care%207%20point%20plan__15_8_2017.pdf

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processes recently. The ASGB has been concerned that there is often far less support available for SGs than for adoptive parents, although they are likely to be dealing with many of the same issues, and often have added complications as the birth parents are members of the family and thus around, sometimes causing difficulties.

During this year a skills taskforce has been running looking into the skills shortages in the UK and at how the apprenticeship levy and wider system are working. There have been a range of roundtable events, which have been very well attended. The overwhelming view appears to be that the apprenticeship levy is not working well at all, and there is a very serious failure in ensuring that 16-18 year olds are being trained with the right skills for the future needs of the economy. There will be more work on this in the coming year.

During the year I have worked closely with Layla Moran, the Parliamentary team and the Liberal Democrat Education Association. The LDEA held two fringe events at Autumn Conference on home schooling and on youth work, which I chaired. At Spring Conference we were successful in getting a motion on knife crime and youth work passed, with support from ALDC. I also chaired a session on SEND at the LGA conference, launching the initial findings of the Isos report.

Lucy Nethsingha is the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on Cambridgeshire County Council and has served as the Lead Member on the Children and Young People's Board at the LGA. Lucy was a primary school teacher and has a masters degree in Education and Psychology.

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