

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

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The Party can point to considerable achievements in the sphere of education, despite the pressure on resources over recent years. It ~~has~~ managed with the full co-operation of many LEAs and parents to improve educational provision in schools and institutions of further education. In higher education the quality of what our Universities have to offer is widely recognised and many polytechnics are doing excellent work in fields of great direct concern to our economic well-being.

In the Report that follows a number of possibilities for further progress are set out, and a number of existing weaknesses identified with suggestions as to how they might be remedied.

Because the Group's proposals all refer to specific matters, its Report does not lend itself to summarizing. But it is convenient to list some of the points where the Group has had to make up its mind on matters currently under discussion, and where some differences of opinion within the Party have become apparent.

- (a) The Group would like to see an expansion of the Assisted Places Scheme.
- (b) The majority of the Group do not believe that in the present state of opinion it would be desirable to suggest an experiment with 'vouchers'.
- (c) The Group strongly welcomes the initiative of the Manpower Services Commission in respect of the 14-18 age-group, and hopes that this will lead to a renewed emphasis on the connection between education and the production of wealth.
- (d) The Group is not in favour of separate treatment for the children of ethnic minorities except in so far as special linguistic assistance is required, and emphasises the need to ensure that all children of whatever background are given fluency in standard English.
- (e) The Group rejects the idea of fixed-term contracts for teachers and believes that improved standards among teachers can be secured in other ways; in this connection it strongly recommends the creation of a General Council for teachers.
- (f) The Group believes that it would not be right to substitute student loans for the basic grants now paid, but feels that there is a variety of useful roles for loans as a supplement to the grants system, always bearing in mind that any loan system would involve some cost to the exchequer.
- (g) The Group is particularly concerned that the provision for part-time and continuing higher education should be expanded and that opportunities should be given at all ages for re-entry into the education process.
- (h) The Group is very concerned that despite falling schools roles school sixth forms should be retained wherever practicable.

REPORT OF POLICY GROUP ON EDUCATION

PART 1: THE SCHOOLS

1. THE CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

The principal feature of a Conservative approach to education is a proper respect for the diversity of needs among children, whatever their ability and degree of motivation and giving weight to the requirements of all groups, from the top 2% who are exceptionally gifted to the much larger group who at present leave full-time education with no formal qualifications and consequently poorer prospects of employment.

2. THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Since the great majority of the nation's children are educated and will continue to be educated in schools which are provided by LEAs, the principal task before a Conservative government is to see that such schools conform to the needs and wishes of parents and pupils and pay due regard to the national interest. In both respects the emphasis must be on standards of achievement and all education policy should be framed with this priority in mind.

3. INDEPENDENT EDUCATION

The Party should reiterate its commitment to independent education both because of the services it provides to those who take advantage of it, and because of its ability to provide a measuring rod for the achievements of the State sector. The Party regards the right of parents to avail themselves of independent education as an inalienable one, and in accordance with the international conventions on human rights to which this country is a party. The Group would welcome an expansion of the Assisted Places Scheme to enable more pupils irrespective of parental income to have the choice of independent education where this seems especially suitable to their needs and aspirations.

4. PARENTAL CHOICE

- (a) A variety of provision combined with the maximum degree of parental choice is the most satisfactory method of ensuring high standards. The exercise of choice is assisted by the publication of school prospectuses, HMI reports and the examination results of individual schools.
- (b) Further measures are needed to deal with those LEAs who put obstacles in the way of parents seeking to exercise their rights under the 1980 Act. It is important that the admissions criteria established by local authorities for individual schools should be published in good time for objections by parents to be registered. It is desirable that the criteria be reviewed by the Secretary of State where his attention is called to the question by a substantial body of local opinion. These modifications should not preclude the use of existing machinery for complaints and appeals. In respect of reorganization, the regulation permitting the intervention of the Secretary of State only where the size of a school was being reduced by over 20% should be amended.

- (c) The great majority of the Group are not convinced that the voucher scheme is the best method for increasing parental choice and thereby improving standards. They feel that its cost would be hard to justify to a highly sceptical public at a time of stretched resources. More thought and public discussion are essential. Only when outstanding questions have been settled and there is evidence of a public demand should a pilot scheme be attempted, particularly since it would have to be preceded by legislation.
- (d) The Group accepts the argument that in rural areas the closing of village schools may present a serious erosion of parental choice. They would wish to see every effort made to retain such schools, and would welcome any plan for making central funds available to help groups of parents who might wish to undertake the running of such a school where there are good educational reasons for retaining it.

## 5. THE HOME AND THE SCHOOL

- (a) More contact between the schools and the homes they cater for is highly desirable. The development of parent-teacher associations and the provision of specific occasions when parents can take part in school-based activities, should receive encouragement.
- (b) Approval was given to the practice of some LEAs in arranging for suitable teachers to visit homes where it is felt that school children are getting inadequate support. Trained volunteers to assist in the development of reading ability offer another innovation that might be generalized. But in all such schemes respect for the privacy of homes should be observed.
- (c) There is national concern about the figures for truancy in some areas, particularly since it is believed that the official statistics underestimate the actual position. The Group suggests that the post of school attendance officer should be revived.
- (d) The idea of closer collaboration between parents and teachers in the case of younger children was one to be encouraged. Pre-school play groups organized by parents in association with the schools to which their children would be going was another way of giving parents a continuous interest in their children's progress at school.
- (e) At the other end of the school experience there was need for a closer association between schools and institutions of further education, including linked courses looking to local job opportunities. In this connection, it was desirable to clarify the legal basis for the provision of further education by local authorities.

## 6. THE ROLE OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

A bias in favour of local responsibility and parental choice cannot conceal the fact that some local authorities do not do all that is needed, and that many parents lack the knowledge and motivation to make the best choices for their children. A positive lead from central government is thus required. To some extent this is already provided for by the work of the HMIs, the new examination and curriculum councils and the monitoring of educational standards by the DES.

## 7. EXAMINATIONS

- (a) The Group was strongly of the opinion that it is crucial to the maintenance of standards that the system of external examinations conducted by independent examination boards should be preserved; though closer collaboration between such boards should be encouraged.
- (b) In respect of the 16+ examinations still under review by the DES, it was felt that it would save confusion and make easier the path of children of middling ability if there were to be a single system, while retaining the separate examinations for O level and CSE and, where necessary, particular courses of study leading to them. Both for those going on to higher or professional education and for those leaving school at 16 and their prospective employers, the retention of the O level was felt to be essential.
- (c) The Group favours the use of graded tests set at a national level to assess the performance of pupils throughout their school careers. Such tests would be incorporated in a personal school record available to all school-leavers and their potential employers. The document should also include the pupil's attendance record and a profile written by the pupil to indicate his or her attitudes and motivations when seeking employment.

## 8. CURRICULUM

The Group supports the expressed desire of most parents that basic literacy and numeracy should form the core of the curriculum. The definition of literacy must include the ability to speak and write standard English. In respect of other subjects, the Group emphasises their view that the different abilities and inclinations of individual pupils should be paramount, with sufficient attention to streaming and setting to enable a different pace and pattern of learning to be tailored to individual accomplishment.

## 9. EDUCATION AND THE CREATION OF WEALTH

- (a) It was generally agreed that the educational system had to some extent neglected the importance of the creation of additional wealth as the foundation of all social progress. More should be done to emphasise at all levels the importance of this fact and its relation to the use and development of modern technology. Courses on the industrial and commercial substructure could usefully replace those on 'educational sociology' on which much time is spent in teacher-training establishments. More could be done to associate industrial and commercial undertakings with the work of the schools.
- (b) The Group welcomed the new initiative for the 14-18 age group of the Manpower Services Commission and hoped that it would lead to a wider recognition of the need for training in productive skills to be recognized as something which should be available in all schools, and given proper status alongside traditional academic subjects, while not excluding the development of some schools with a particular interest in this area. While agreeing that ultimately responsibility for education should come to rest with a single Department, the Group would like to see the present role of the MSC continue until there is evidence of the widespread change of attitudes which it is one of the objects of the initiative to promote.

- (c) Conscious of the need to market our goods as well as produce them, the Group would welcome some central initiative to improve the teaching of modern languages in which Britain has a very bad record by comparison with some of her competitors.

#### 10. RELIGION AND CONDUCT

- (a) The Group accepts the right of parents to secure a religious education for their children and the need to give strong support to voluntary aided schools.
- (b) Members of the group were concerned about the failure of many schools to fulfil the provisions for religious education in the 1944 Act or to accept the letter without the spirit. Children whose religious education lapsed after the third year became University students with insufficient knowledge to appreciate this country's literary and cultural heritage. The Group would therefore welcome more attention being given to the study of the Christian religion, subject of course to the right of withdrawal for children whose parents expressed conscientious objections to their participation in such study.
- (c) The Group recognized that in the public mind there existed a feeling that the neglect of religious education often went along with lack of attention to moral education and to the inculcation of proper standards of speech, personal appearance and behaviour as well as of the duties owed by the individual to the community. In this respect the attitude of a minority of teachers left much to be desired.

#### 11. DISCIPLINE

- (a) The Group is concerned at the evidence for the existence of serious disciplinary problems in many schools. It believes that attempts are being made on ideological grounds to weaken the idea that the teacher is in loco parentis on which all discipline rests. The approach taken to discipline is a matter for individual schools and should be worked out in consultation with parents. The Head, the staff and governors all have responsibilities in this area which implies close supervision of what goes on by the heads and senior staff. And this also has implications for the practical aspects of teacher training. In the last resort the LEAs must be prepared to intervene.
- (b) Gross bullying and actual violence to teachers and other pupils must be dealt with instantly and with the full backing of the LEA and the law. A variety of sanctions should be used including the powers of suspension and expulsion. Teachers must be certain when exercising their functions that they will receive protection where this is essential.
- (c) Opponents of this insistence on discipline should be reminded of the fact that one reason for the shortfalls in books and equipment which are complained of is the high cost of theft and vandalism.

#### 12. ETHNIC MINORITIES

The Group recognized that in some areas particular problems are created for the schools by the presence of a high proportion of children from the ethnic minorities, whose command of English is in some cases inadequate to enable them fully to benefit from their schooling. Nevertheless it was felt that it was not in the interests

of the ethnic minorities, nor in accordance with the desire of most of their members for them to receive any separate treatment that would set them apart from their fellow citizens; though it was right to take account of their religious scruples in respect for instance of single-sex schooling. Teaching should always be in the English language since its mastery is a precondition of employment and advancement in an English-speaking country. Where special linguistic help was essential, this should be given only on grounds of individual need. Where parents so desired, opportunities should be given for children to retain contact with the cultures of their own communities.

### 13. THE SCHOOLS AND FINANCE

It was felt that the main responsibility for high standards must always rest with the individual school. This responsibility could be brought home to schools more easily if schools (or groups of schools) were given some measure of financial autonomy within the overall LEA budget. While there is no direct relation between the quality of education and financial lavishness, there were ways in which a wiser choice of expenditure could make a difference. It was important in times of stringency that no unnecessary expenditure should be forced upon the schools such as a constant change of textbooks or set books in subjects not themselves undergoing rapid change.

### 14. EXCELLENCE AWARDS FOR SCHOOLS

Schools should also be encouraged to compete among themselves for an improvement in standards. Something akin to the Queen's Award for Industry could be offered to those schools which had, in the opinion of an independent panel of judges, done most to improve their standards over the past twelve months. Such annual awards could either be offered nationally by the Secretary of State or on a county basis.

### 15. THE ROLE OF HEAD TEACHERS

The Group fully supports the new schemes for the training of head teachers in the increasingly arduous skills of management, and leadership. They feel that in addition some further attention should be paid to the ways in which head teachers are selected and that some training is essential for schools governors.

### 16. IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS

- (a) The Group welcomed the publication of the White Paper 'Teaching Quality' (Cmd 8836). While recognising recent improvements in the quality of those entering the profession and the probability that the measures in the White Paper will bring about further improvements, the Group would still wish to see longer and more closely supervised probationary periods.
- (b) The Group considered the idea of fixed term contracts for teachers but were not convinced of its general acceptability. It was feared that such contracts if made the norm, might diminish the attractions of the profession to otherwise suitable candidates, and create additional problems for head teachers and assistant head teachers. The Group recognised the strength of the argument for fixed term contracts in respect of head teachers, but felt that these would be open to misuse for political reasons.

## 17. GENERAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHERS

The Group is very strongly of the opinion that the most effective way of improving the quality of the teaching profession would be to assist teachers to organize themselves on the model of other professions by the creation of a General Teaching Council with the right to prescribe standards of training and conduct and to enforce them through registration. It sees no reason why trade union objections to such a system (which already exists in Scotland) should be allowed to prevail, since the functions of such a Council would not include negotiations on conditions of employment or remuneration. It is desirable that such a body should ultimately be composed of teachers directly elected on a regional basis but not through the machinery of trade unions, and that (as an interim measure) the Secretary of State might nominate a proportion of the membership while the machinery and policy were taking shape.

## 18. THE USE OF CENTRAL FINANCE

The Group welcomed the decision of the DES to reserve some of its funds for earmarked grants to promote ideas and practices about which it has particular concern, and where a small infusion of extra money might stimulate action.

## 19. SIXTH FORMS

The problem of falling school rolls is impinging very seriously on the size of sixth forms, and the provision of a sufficiently broad curriculum for students in all schools. A variety of solutions, including sixth form colleges, may be acceptable depending on local circumstances and parental opinion. However, since we believe that the sixth form has an important influence on the whole ethos of schools, they should be preserved in a substantial number of schools.

PART 11: HIGHER EDUCATION

## 1. FINANCIAL AUTONOMY FOR UNIVERSITIES

While accepting the need for restraint in public expenditure, the Group also feels that the tempo of the cuts imposed upon the Universities has prevented the reductions always being made in the sectors where they would be most useful. The provision of money for short-term appointments for young lecturers, while in itself welcome, has also made demands upon Universities to act at a speed which prevents a proper consideration of priorities. The Group believes that an effort should be made to devise a system of financing which would enable the Universities to plan further ahead for the most effective and economical use of their resources. The Group believes that the present control through setting ceilings on the numbers of undergraduates to be admitted should be removed as soon as possible so that Universities become more autonomous and financially responsible.

## 2. UNIVERSITIES AND PRIVATE FUNDING

We would wish to see every encouragement to Universities to seek external funding and would welcome changes in the tax system to encourage additional benefactions. Universities and industry should be encouraged to work more closely together for their mutual benefit and the Group welcomes such innovations as the science parks at Cambridge and Aston.

3. THE ROLE OF THE UGC

In the light of the need of the Universities to be enabled and encouraged to respond to a rapidly changing environment, those responsible for publicly funding them will have to take a more positive attitude than in the past to help ensure that the nation's needs are met, and that wasteful overlapping of provision is minimised. The Group believes that the traditional organisation and manning of the UGC requires reconsideration if it is to remain the pivotal institution.

4. THE NEED TO DIFFERENTIATE

The Group believes that some of our problems have arisen because of the past acceptance of the view that all Universities must cover the same ground at the same standard. Forty-six Universities in a country of Britain's size cannot be successful along these lines but only if they accept a differentiation of roles, areas of specialisation and clientele. The UGC and the Research Councils must be encouraged to direct resources so as to promote centres of excellence in specific fields within named institutions.

5. LENGTH OF COURSES

The traditional degree course of three or four three-term years should not be regarded as sacrosanct. A different pattern of study might suit different groups of students. We would like to see more Universities try out the two four-term year first degree course which has been found acceptable to both staff and students at Buckingham. This would represent a more effective use of physical plant and enable more students to be admitted to degree courses over a period of time, without additional expense.

6. GRANTS AND LOANS

The Group would not wish to see the present system of grants to first-degree students replaced wholly or in part by a loan system. They would, however, welcome a loan-system as an adjunct to the grants system in order to provide help in appropriate circumstances; for instance where parents fail to make their contribution. The present provision of grants for post-graduate students could also be supplemented by loans. But the Group recognises that whether the grants are State-administered or made commercially with the State's guarantee, there would be a cost to the Exchequer, heaviest in the early years of any scheme.

7. PART-TIME PROVISION

The Group welcomes the renewed interest being shown by Universities and polytechnics in the provision of part-time facilities for degree courses. It believes continuing education for adults is an essential part of the national provision for meeting the rapid changes likely to occur in the economy and society, and that opportunities for late entry and re-entry into the educational system should be made widely available.

8. CONTINUING EDUCATION AND THE NEW TECHNOLOGY

Full use should be made of modern technology in continuing education and the updating of skills. Some members of the Group strongly believe, for instance, that the use of home video tapes may make it possible to create refresher courses for managers and others who would be unable or unwilling to attend conventional

centres of continuing education. The Group feels that this is an area in which the Open University should play a major part.

9. POLYTECHNICS

The Group feels that encouragement should continue to be given to the work of the Polytechnics, many of which do invaluable work in areas of great importance to the economy. They welcome the creation of the National Advisory Board and hope that its work will lead to an even firmer concentration by Polytechnics on the task for which they are best suited, and not encourage them to emulate activities more appropriate to Universities, for instance in the more costly aspects of research.

10. THE ROLE OF THE CNAA

The Group considers that the CNAA has been insufficiently alert to the expansion by Polytechnics into areas, for instance in the social sciences, where there is a lack of adequate teaching for producing first-class work and where prospects for the employment of their products are dubious. It was called to the attention of the Group that on some occasions the time taken to validate a course actually hinders the desire of a Polytechnic to meet particular local needs, as indicated to it by the business community.

11. THE POLITICIZATION OF POLYTECHNICS

The Group is worried by the penetration of some Polytechnics by small groups of dedicated political extremists concerned to use their presence to promote revolutionary causes rather than study, and deplores the fact that toleration of such activities has been carried to the point where the majority of students at such places are severely hampered in their legitimate pursuits. Where neither the Local authority nor the CNAA have proved an adequate safeguard, the Secretary of State must be prepared to intervene directly.

12. STUDENT UNIONS

- (a) The Group acknowledges the part played by student unions in many areas of higher education in the provision of essential facilities, such as catering, hostels and sports facilities. It recognises, however, that the growth in recent years of the number of sabbatical officers has caused anxiety, and would welcome an inquiry into this aspect of the matter.
- (b) Universities and other institutions should be required to ensure that union funds are monitored to prevent them from being diverted to outside "causes", and to see that all legitimate political and religious societies receive equality of treatment.
- (c) Membership of the National Union of Students should be a voluntary matter for each individual student.

13. NON-ADVANCED FURTHER EDUCATION

Non-advanced further education is a vital part of the education system, providing as it does a tremendous variety of strongly vocational courses which enable students to qualify for jobs essential to the national economy, and

follow satisfying and rewarding careers. Parents often know very little about these courses, and they need to be publicised as excellent post-sixteen education for young people of considerable ability and motivation who will not qualify for universities. Such courses may be either full-time or, when they are linked with the school curriculum, part-time, and they make the learning process far more obviously relevant to the student and enhance his or her prospects of employment.