

R
RESPECT



ANOTHER SCOTLAND IS POSSIBLE

A REPORT ON THE FUTURE
OF SCOTTISH EDUCATION

INDEPENDENCE

S
SOCIALISM

E
ENVIRONMENTALISM

RISE: Scotland's Left Alliance

Who We Are

We are a pro-independence left-wing alliance launched in 2015. Our name stands for our principles: respect, independence, socialism, and environmentalism. The alliance aims to provide a socialist alternative to neoliberalism in Scotland.

Contact Us

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A Different Approach

It is understandably tempting to view issues such as educational inequality as being problems of the education system itself. This approach - which isolates educational challenges within an individual 'silo' - simplifies the debate and legitimises an environment where being seen to take action - almost regardless of what that action actually involves - becomes the priority.

This culture often manifests itself in the form of 'pledges' to spend a specific sum of money or employ a particular number of staff. Such promises are an effective means of generating media coverage, and are often used to construct clear dividing lines between one party and another, but they offer few, if any, real solutions.

We end up with a lot of heat, but very little light.

Our approach is different. We recognise that educational inequality is a complex issue rooted in poverty and multi-generational deprivation. As such, we believe that a cohesive approach incorporating areas such as education, health, employment and housing is necessary if Scotland is to tackle this problem effectively.

The hard truth is this: so long as we live in a desperately unequal country, we will continue to struggle with devastating educational inequalities. This does not mean that our educational institutions are entirely powerless, but it does force us to consider whether our existing approach to improvement might be misguided.

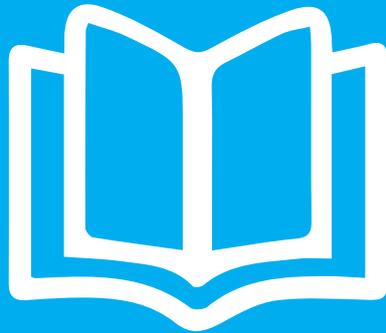
A lot of time is spent talking about “driving up standards” and “reducing the attainment gap”; in reality our goal should be to address the specific aspects of our educational structures and culture which magnify, rather than mitigate, the socio-economic conditions at the root of educational inequality.

The bad news is that much of our existing approach to the challenges we face is deeply flawed, with a focus on a range of interventions which offer short-term benefits to politicians but are unlikely to have any real, lasting impact on the problems faced by schools, teachers and pupils. With the SNP - who are all but guaranteed to form the next government - refusing to rule out the adoption of the Academies model favoured in England, and suggesting that they will strip Local Authorities of much, if not all, of their responsibilities regarding education provision, it seems likely that this problem will get worse over the coming years.

The good news is that we do, in fact, know how to enhance the quality of our children’s educational experiences and, with the right political will, are more than capable of delivering widespread improvements in Scottish education.

This document outlines our approach to educational reform in the following areas:

- Curriculum for Excellence and the New Qualifications
- Teacher Workload and Continuing Professional Development
- The Imposition of National Standardised Testing
- The School Starting Age
- LGBTI+
- Increased Rights for Young People
- Additional Support Needs
- Further Education
- Student Funding
- Private Schools
- Religious Representatives on Education Committees
- Military Recruitment Visits



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Curriculum for Excellence and the New Qualifications

The primary and lower-secondary curriculum is too cluttered, with an enormous range of 'Experiences and Outcomes' encouraging an audit-based, box-ticking approach to progress and making it difficult for teachers to realise the full potential of the new curricular model.

In upper-secondary (the period from S4-S6 commonly referred to as the 'Senior Phase') the situation is arguably even worse, with the burden of assessment becoming a direct barrier to better learning and teaching. This is one of the major failings that has prevented the successful development and delivery of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) at Secondary level.

Having been promised a revolution in Scottish education, and in particular our approach to the assessment of young people, over-worked teachers have too often been left with little option but to make cosmetic changes to existing courses. With many of these new courses incorporating a greater range of assessment standards, teachers are now required to carry out more formal and summative assessment, not less, leaving less time for in-depth teaching.

In short we have narrowed, not broadened, the educational experiences of our young people.

This problem has been exacerbated by ongoing failures of the Scottish Government, the SQA and Education Scotland, with teachers complaining about both the quality and quantity of explanatory and exemplification materials for the New Qualifications.

As a consequence of these issues, the assessment approaches employed in schools under CfE are largely the same as those used in previous years. We need change but, as things stand, there is no prospect of it happening.

As Professor Mark Priestley (Deputy Head of the School of Social Sciences at Stirling University) recently argued, it is time for a simplified approach to CfE. This process would allow us to develop the "new narrative" and "strengthened middle" called for in the recent OECD review and, as a consequence, enable schools to engage more fully with the core principles at the heart of the curriculum. The continued insistence on the generation and collation of standardised assessment data, whether from school management, Local Authorities or central government, should also be tackled as a matter of urgency.

We also need a serious and wide-ranging debate about our out-dated system of assessment and certification. This is necessary in order to ensure that Scottish education is fit for the 21st Century, but it would also allow us to address the fact that our existing approach is weighted in favour of students from affluent families.

It is critical, however, that such a discussion is not driven, or hindered, by party-political squabbles, nor should it be hobbled by the fear of negative headlines - this issue is far too important to be reduced to an opportunity for partisan point-

scoring.

RISE notes with interest the Policy-Lab model employed by the Common Weal think-tank when developing their recent paper on education policy, and would be keen to explore this approach in the wider context of Scottish education.

Teacher Workload and Continuing Professional Development

Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. Unless we change the way we treat our educators, we will continue to fail our children - it's as simple as that.

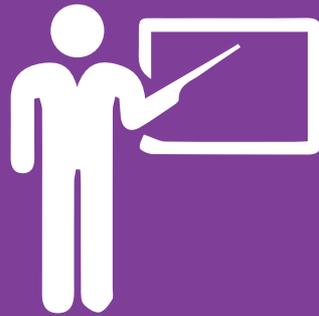
Teachers' professionalism and dedication has been taken for granted: the average teacher now works an extra 33 per cent above their contractual requirements due to a needless system of bureaucracy, accountability and micro-management. As previously noted, aspects of CfE and the New Qualifications have also lead to increased workloads for teachers, ultimately making it increasingly difficult for teachers to get on with their jobs.

Surveys by teaching unions also paint a picture of education professionals losing more and more of their time to data-entry, target-setting and verification procedures, all the while generating information for the benefit of management, Local Authorities and agencies such as the SQA. Such activity is often of little, if any, benefit to those who should matter most - pupils. This whole culture is rooted in a fundamental lack of trust in the teaching profession, and it must be decisively swept away if we are to make real progress.

If we are serious about tackling educational inequality then our top priority should be supporting the teaching profession by giving them the trust, the tools and the freedom they need to improve. We believe that teacher numbers must be increased year on year, with a focus on areas of deprivation and those which struggle to recruit staff. Crucially, increased staffing, a reduction in bureaucracy and a re-evaluation of assessment demands must be linked to the protection of teachers' Non-Contact Time.

The time teachers spend not teaching is vital and should, if anything, be extended given that Scottish teachers are significantly above the OECD average in terms of their annual teaching hours. Such a shift would allow teachers more time to prepare lessons and feedback while also recognising the transformative potential of collaborative practice and teacher-driven Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Central government and Local Authority bureaucrats should have minimal, if any, control over teachers' ongoing professional learning. Instead, government should seek to empower organisations such as Pedagogoo, an online, grassroots network of teachers sharing their practice and supporting each other to improve. TeachMeets - where practising teachers organise and deliver their own CPD events - should be fully supported, but never controlled.



Politicians have no business telling teachers how to do their jobs. The government should abandon plans to impose National Standardised Testing on schools and apologise to the teaching profession.

The Imposition of National Standardised Testing

Decisions regarding the assessment of pupils must be made by teachers, not politicians.

We have consistently argued that plans to impose National Standardised Testing on schools - instigated by the last SNP government at the behest of both the Tories and Labour - will do nothing whatsoever to address the shocking levels of educational inequality in our country. Instead, this regressive and politically-motivated move will lead to damaging league tables, increased teaching to the test and, contrary to the assertions of testing enthusiasts, the further undermining of the teaching profession. Both our children and our educators deserve better.

Another key defence of these plans - that they will increase the amount of information available to parents - is also flawed. The truth is that standardised testing could reduce the amount of high-quality information available to parents by narrowing our focus onto de-contextualised percentages. This form of reporting is also likely to lead to the return of sub-levelling, a process which arguably fatally undermined the early introduction of CfE.

As our previous report - *The Case Against National Standardised Testing* - has already shown there exists substantial evidence that the government's plans will have serious and detrimental effects upon Scottish education.

It is also worth remembering that questions around the origin of the government's National Standardised Testing plans remain unanswered. We know that the written advice on this issue is limited to just four emails from two individuals, but the government refuses to publish this advice and has consistently rejected requests to do so (a matter currently under consideration by the Scottish Information Commissioner). RISE will continue to argue that this information should be in the public domain.

Our view on National Standardised Testing is clear: politicians have no business telling teachers how to do their jobs. The government should abandon plans to impose National Standardised Testing on schools and apologise to the teaching profession.

The School Starting Age

Another aspect of the Scottish education system which should be reviewed is the school starting age. In recent years it has become increasingly clear that our children start formal schooling far too early.

Information collated by the Upstart campaign - which is calling for an increased school starting age - clearly highlights the need for change. Just 12 per cent of countries send their children to school as early as we do, and all of those are former members of the British Empire. We presume that the status-quo is best for our children, yet the evidence paints a very different picture.

Starting school aged four brings no long-term educational benefits, but is associated with significant social and emotional disadvantages. Countries with later school starting ages outperform Scotland both in terms of child well-being and overall education achievement.

Ultimately, RISE wishes to see the establishment of a free, universal, play-based Kindergarten stage for ages 3-7, with formal schooling starting thereafter. This transformative policy would have enormous educational and cultural benefits whilst also helping to address issues such as childcare. Although such a fundamental shift is not possible within a single parliamentary term it should, nonetheless, become a high-priority goal in Scottish education.

For more information visit www.upstart.scot

LGBTI+

RISE is proud to support the aims of the Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) campaign and will fight to ensure that its recommendations are implemented. Although many schools have worked hard to address issues faced by LGBTI+ students, it is clear that we still have a very long way to go. More must be done to build an education system that is truly inclusive for all young people.

It is unacceptable that TIE have been forced to engage in crowdfunding in order to facilitate specific LGBTI+ training for teachers. The Scottish Government must step in and offer funding for such courses, with the initial goal of having at least one member of staff in each school trained specifically to deal with homophobic bullying and other LGBTI+ pastoral issues.

Ultimately we would expect to see all teachers provided with training in these areas, and for the issues to be fully incorporated into Initial Teacher Education. For the avoidance of doubt, this requirement must apply to all schools in Scotland, with no opt-outs for faith-based educational institutions.

The contribution of LGBTI+ groups and individuals to our society should be both highlighted and celebrated, and the achievements of the LGBTI+ rights movement should be clearly recognised within the school curriculum.

For more information visit www.tiecampaign.co.uk

Increased Rights for Young People

Pupil Councils should be fully recognised within school governance frameworks and that they should control a specific annual budget, to be used for improvements to their school communities.

Schools should also be encouraged to hold hustings and voter registration events to encourage young people to become fully engaged in the political process.

In line with their ability to vote in elections, 16-18 year olds should have the

right to withdraw themselves from Religious Observance (RO) rather than require parental permission to do so. All schools should be expected to provide appropriate alternative accommodation and activities for those opting out of RO. In addition, the decision to withdraw from RO must not mean that young people are in any way excluded from their school communities.

Additional Support Needs

It is vital that Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision in Scottish education is protected and that cuts to this vital service are reversed. Thousands of young people all over the country depend on support staff to help them access the education to which they are entitled.

The specialist skills and knowledge offered by these individuals, and the relationships they build with those in their care, are essential to any modern education system.

That staffing levels in this area have not been specifically protected in the same way as classroom teachers is effectively discriminatory and, in our view, wholly unacceptable. The professionalism and dedication of support staff must be recognised and respected. One measure which would go some way to achieving this aim would be a move away from the use of short-term, temporary and term-time contracts.

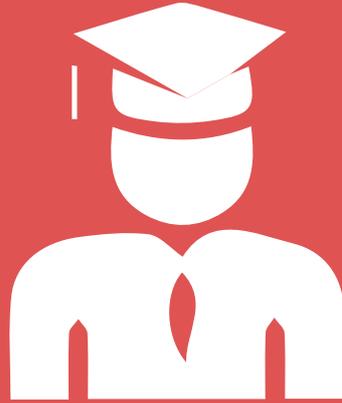
Further Education

Further Education is a vital component of our education system, offering opportunities for people - a large proportion of them working class - to improve their lives. In recent years the FE sector has borne the brunt of brutal education cuts, with courses slashed and jobs lost across the country.

It is also clear that the government's flagship policy of college regionalisation has failed on its own terms - students' educational experiences have not improved and Audit Scotland has suggested that the expected financial savings have failed to materialise. Instead, a series of scandals has rocked the FE sector, raising serious questions about the existing approach to organisation and governance.

In some areas - such as Glasgow - course provision has also been centralised, forcing learners to travel further in order to pursue their education. This has increased the time and money required to be a college student. As a result it is now harder than ever for certain individuals - for example single mothers or those on very low incomes - to access Further Education. This is not acceptable and should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Cuts to colleges - both in terms of finances and course provision - must be reversed. We also reject the previous government's argument that their cuts to college provision are justifiable because they targeted short or non-certificated courses. For many people these courses represented a first step back into education and their loss has in effect increased the barriers to education



RISE believes that an independent enquiry into the previous government's Further Education reforms should be initiated as a matter of urgency.

experienced by some of the most vulnerable and alienated members of our society.

An immediate end to the use of Arms Length Foundations, into which almost £100m has been funnelled in recent years, is also essential. This is public money which could, and should, have been used to pay for more teachers and courses in our colleges. It is outrageous that colleges continue to suffer while such enormous sums sit idle, and the next government must ensure that this practice is ended once and for all.

Given the scale of reform required, with changes needed to funding models, governance and overall organisation of the college sector, RISE believes that an independent enquiry into the previous government's FE reforms should be initiated as a matter of urgency.

RISE fully supported the recent strike by FE lecturers and will support unions as they continue to improve working conditions for educators. We note that some of Scotland's colleges remain opposed to National Pay Bargaining for staff, a position we regard as completely unacceptable. Collective bargaining is a basic employment right and must apply across the country with no exceptions. We are also resolutely opposed to the ongoing casualisation of the FE workforce through the use of short-term, temporary and part-time contracts.

Student Funding

RISE supports the NUS education manifesto and calls on all parties to back their Shaping Scotland's Future campaign in parliament. We will continue to push for wide-ranging reforms to funding models to ensure a fairer deal for Scotland's students.

We believe that the first priority should be the full restoration of bursary support for those on low-incomes. Research has shown that our current funding model effectively makes greater financial demands of those who start off with least: on completion of their studies, students from poorer backgrounds tend to face higher debts than their well-off peers, leaving them further disadvantaged for years to come. This situation is manifestly unfair.

We also know that mature students are seriously affected by this issue as they receive less support than those entering Further or Higher education at a younger age. This anomaly must be addressed immediately in order to ensure that access to education is genuinely open to all.

Private Schools

Last year the 'charitable status' of Scotland's private schools saw them enjoy a £10 million tax break. This money would have been put to better use employing hundreds of teachers, with special attention given to staffing levels in schools which serve areas of deprivation.



RISE rejects the idea that private schools, which both symbolise and perpetuate social inequality, should avoid paying taxes.

It is clear that such institutions - with average yearly fees of more than £10,000 - are not charities, and RISE rejects the idea that institutions which both symbolise and perpetuate social inequality should avoid paying taxes. We will demand that this indefensible arrangement is brought to an end.

Ultimately we believe that fee-paying education - which allows the wealthy to both reinforce and directly benefit from plutocratic social inequality - should be abolished, as is the case in Finland.

Religious Representatives on Education Committees

All members of Local Authority education committees must be democratically accountable to local people at the ballot box.

Under the Local Government Act (Scotland) 1973 all councils in Scotland must appoint representatives of the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church and one other religious body onto the groups which control education policy (or to the full council if no education committee exists). These representatives, despite being entirely unelected, enjoy full voting rights on educational matters, giving them significant - and undue - influence over the school experiences of Scotland's children.

In 2013 the Church of Scotland's Blue Book pointed out that the "three church representatives hold the balance of power on 19 local authority committees". This means that in nearly 60 per cent of Scottish councils a group of unelected and unaccountable individuals with no democratic mandate hold an effective veto.

Put simply, these arrangements are not compatible with the principles of local, democratic accountability. We therefore support calls to remove the requirement for unelected religious representatives on education committees.

Military Recruitment Visits

Between 2010 and 2012 the Armed Forces carried out 1783 visits to 377 Scottish educational institutions. At least one third of these visits were directly focused on recruitment. A range of organisations including Forces Watch, the Quakers and the EIS have raised concerns about such behaviour.

RISE supports calls to end the practice of targeted military recruitment visits in educational institutions, and has particular concerns about such activities seeking to enlist children into the Armed Forces.

