**Comments on Objective 4 of the Radical Party’s manifesto relating to Education and Science.**

I preface my comments with a background comment, namely that I do see satisfying the subsidiarity element of Distributivism being best served by a federal structure. This would, in my view, meet the criticism related in the early part of Objective 4 where it refers to “Reinforcing a system which excludes a third of the population from any real political influence” especially when combined with a revision of our voting methodology. Indeed I believe a review of voting methodology to include an element of proportionality comes into its own within a federal structure and would probably not work on a whole-nation structure as we have now. This is not irrelevant to the subject of education as will, I hope, emerge from the following.

Key themes within the education issue include:-

1. Collaborative structures, including mentoring, sharing best practice, working in concert so that all schools are good schools – replacing the competitive elements currently in being. Competition should be reserved for inter-school sports which should be encouraged. I am aware that MATs have to some extent taken the place of LEAs to provide these facilities, but standards are patchy and non-members of a MAT are sometimes excluded. LEAs’ performance was also patchy on this in the past and this should not be forgotten.
2. Reprofessionalising the teaching force, to include further development of the College of Teachers. This will entail a substantial review of our approach to teaching and learning (see point 15 below).
3. Restoration of local education authorities, but on a provincial scale, with each province having its own education directorate with a great deal of independence. Provinces would have the example of successful practice elsewhere in the UK to compare with their own performance, with strategic decisions on policy taken at provincial level.
4. School Change and Development to be the underlying ethos of “inspections”, replacing the blame culture. Each province would take responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of its own schools, with teams remaining in a developmental role in schools requiring improvement to ensure the required improvements take place and endure. There is an interesting precedent to this methodology in an intervention by the NHS watchdog in St George's Hospital (Tooting)'s cardiac surgery unit. Senior doctors and NHS managers acted as "critical friends", promising progress reports on the unit's efforts to improve under their guidance. The group involved supported the Hospital's trust, providing advice and scrutiny as the trust worked through its plans to improve the unit.
5. Reduction of bureaucracy, with more hands-on contact made at provincial level.
6. The current Teachers’ Standards to be reviewed. They should be guaranteed by the Teaching Force (e.g. through the College of Teachers (henceforth CoT)?) in conjunction with Provincial Education Authorities.
7. The need for subsidiarity to be satisfied by decisions taken at closest level to each operational unit (i.e. in each school) under the purview of the LEA of each province who will take charge of school organisation decisions (e.g. school expansion and new school establishment); the accountability framework (inspections, performance reviews etc) should sit here too. There should be a National Education Framework and a Federal Authority responsible for it (e.g. a DfE) as well as the provision to each LEA of its funding on a simple, fair funding formula worked out with the CoT/Provincial LEAs on an annual basis (unless the federal system allows local income tax, in which funding would remain a provincial responsibility). The Framework will also provide a structure for qualifications within which Provincial LEAs will make their locally determined decisions on exam choices. It is my view that this framework should provide for a side-stepping of GCSE, with stage 4 and 5 qualifications amalgamated and to include technical qualification with a thorough-going unified style qualification of rigour and breadth. This stage would benefit from a modified UTC style structure with a core (possibly STEM) programme for x% of curriculum time and electives (“academic and technical”) for the remainder of curriculum time.
8. The Academy (including UTC, Studio and Free School) experiment has not produced the overall excellence we require. All these schools should revert to Local Education Authority (at provincial level) control and ownership.
9. It is my personal view that it is time to remove the private, fee-paying element from our system. The private education of middle and upper class children (set apart from the rest of us!) simply ensures their entry into positions of power and influence (like their parents!) to the exclusion of others. All current schools of this sort should be:
   1. Closed or
   2. Adopted by their Provincial LEA and become state institutions.
10. In the spirit of inclusion, all schools should be secular and the teaching of any specific religion (rather than religions in a Humanities context) should be removed from the state school sector.
11. Although there is some ambiguity in some of the research on this topic, good performance in schools will be enhanced by:-
    1. Reduced class sizes throughout the stages
    2. A reprofessionalised teaching force (I see no role for industry style Teacher Unions) committed to every school being a good school and open to continuing development and improvement in their own performance for the benefit of their pupils
    3. Stage attainment targets agreed with the Professional Teachers’ body (CoT?) with individual school performance reviewed critically within each LEA
    4. Guarantees relating to the imparting of a wide range of skills (soft and hard) as agreed by teachers (e.g. through the CoT) and accepting the influence of but not in thrall to employers.
12. Like Health Care, education should be available to every young person (with an adult education section for grown-ups) free at source. University fees are divisive and damaging to young people’s early adult lives. It is time for a review of our rationale for Universities and a serious attempt to establish parity of esteem for technical education to boost the nation’s pool of skilled workers and leaders, with apprenticeships of the old style restored for young people who would thrive in them.
13. A rethink of parents’ place in the education of their children should balance the emphasis on rights by an emphasis on responsibilities, in an attempt to address the “resistance movement” currently acting as a brake on our education service. Parents must take on board the responsibility, particularly, for ensuring that their children are “school ready” when they begin their schooling and that they behave appropriately when it is under way. In line with this, the government should limit the foisting of ever more duties/responsibilities on the teaching force, especially when parental responsibility is the better solution. The dependency culture encouraged by e.g. “wrap-around care “ with its breakfast and after-school “baby sitting” must be ended as parents’ responsibilities are clarified and insisted on.
14. Early years would be best provided on the basis of “getting ready for school”, with an emphasis on socialising and play, like the play groups that flourished some years ago.
15. Responsibility for inclusion relating to disability, gender, LACs, SEN, E2L, traveller children and NEET should lie with each provincial LEA in a joined-up way with the province’s other directorates.
16. I do despair of some approaches to education in vogue for some time now, a despair that was shared by Dr Bob Sharpe, one of my more profound Philosophy Professors, sadly deceased, whose obituary in the Independent in May 2006 included this:

“His deep commitment to the idea that our tastes in the arts can be more or less well informed was closely linked with his anger at images that have come to dominate public thinking about education: for example, the image of pupils and students as "customers". In a letter to The Independent (15 August 2001), he wrote, with characteristic passion:

“The dreadful thing about all this is that nobody will be surprised that such stupid and ill- considered twaddle comes from the Chairman of the Learning and Skills Council in an address to the Royal Society of Arts. The rock-bottom morale in education in this country is not only a product of the way that endless and pointless paper chases have interfered with teaching and learning; it is also a result of the way education seems to be run by people who have no understanding of the way education enriches lives or the way it can be a voyage of discovery, and who lack the wit to see the obvious objections to their view that education is just another form of business.”

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