

Message to
conference:
it's time to

value

education.



The pandemic has caused huge damage to children and young people's learning. Education funding needs to increase substantially if we want every child to fulfil their potential. Primary pupils are up to 3.2 months behind in maths in the autumn term of 2021. And the disadvantage attainment gap in reading and maths has increased by around one month.

Sir Kevan Collins, the former education recovery czar, calculated that £15 billion in extra funding is needed for the next three years to enable pupils to compensate for lost learning. The Government's decision to spend only £3.1 billion on education recovery shows a failure of understanding and ambition for our children and young people. This amounts to just £310 per pupil. Other countries are spending far more – the US is investing £1,830 per young person and the figure is £2,090 a head in the Netherlands, according to figures provided by the Education Policy Institute.

Class sizes continue to increase. Secondary class sizes are now at their highest since records began in 1978 and primary classes are at their highest this century. Class sizes have risen fastest in schools that teach the

most deprived pupils. With ever growing numbers, teachers and support staff have a far harder job in ensuring every child gets the attention they need.

If we are to value education, the Government needs to increase funding and invest in recovery in the Comprehensive Spending Review this autumn.

The most successful nations are developing education systems which enable them to compete in a fast-changing world where new technologies and new industries are changing the way people work, communicate, learn and develop.

The UK is being left behind in this race to economic prosperity and social inclusion. Comparisons between the English system and high performing education nations are worrying. Disadvantaged pupils in England are 18.1 months of learning behind their more affluent peers by the time they finish their GCSEs.

Covid-19 has shone a harsh light on the plight of 4.3 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2019-2020. That's 31 per cent of children, or nine in a classroom of 30. Child poverty destroys children's potential. Forty per cent of the education

attainment gap is set in stone before children even start school. Work does not provide a guaranteed route out of poverty in the UK. Seventy-five per cent of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one person works.

Too many children and their families live in sub-standard, overcrowded homes where there is nowhere quiet to learn. An estimated nine per cent of UK families do not have a laptop, tablet or desktop computer. Two million UK households don't have access to the internet. These families are not able to fully participate in modern society. Remote learning is much more difficult without devices or the internet.

It should be obvious that children who are hungry, cold or stressed find it more difficult to learn.

To value education, we need to end child poverty and make sure no child is left behind.

The English education system tops the OECD league table for the amount of tests its pupils take at primary and secondary level. Tests have their place in a broad and balanced assessment regime but become less accurate as a marker of achievement in a subject when they are overused.

Over-testing has a profoundly negative effect on pupils' attitudes to learning and the development of their skills. England now tops the international league tables for rote learning and memorisation. Whilst this technique is useful for lower order thinking it does not, according to the OECD, enable pupils to develop cognitive activation strategies to use the knowledge they have learned in a range of real-world situations.

Children entering education in 2021 will be young adults in 2033. Schools can prepare them for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, to solve problems that have not yet been anticipated. It will be a shared responsibility to seize opportunities and find solutions. To navigate through such uncertainty, students will need to develop curiosity, imagination, resilience and self-regulation; they will need to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others; cope with failure and rejection, and to move forward in the face of adversity.

In order to achieve these goals our curriculum and assessment

system must be changed. Our children and young people need experience of making and doing as well as reading and writing. They need more teaching and less testing time.

That is why the National Education Union (NEU) is supporting the New Era independent commission on assessment, working with the CBI, Parent Kind, the Edge Foundation, academics, teachers and leaders to envisage what a 21st century assessment and qualification system should look like and what knowledge and skills it should engender in children and young adults.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic teachers, leaders and support staff have been on the front line – teaching children remotely, safeguarding and caring for them.

But England's education system is progressively weakened because our teachers are leaving the profession increasingly early in their careers. Astonishingly, one in four teachers leaves within

two years of starting the job. Nearly 40 per cent of teachers leave within ten years, driven out by excessive workload and stress.

To make matters worse, the Government has imposed a pay freeze. This will compound the damage caused by a decade of real terms pay cuts for teachers, which has contributed to recruitment and retention problems in the profession.

It should be obvious that no education system can exceed the quality of its teachers and that successful education systems keep their teachers in the profession, support and develop them.

That is why the NEU supports good work for teachers, so that they feel valued as professionals and remain in teaching, raising standards in schools and enhancing the life chances of their pupils. If we are to value education, we need to value educators.

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