

# Post-16: what Labour should do

**Ian Duckett details some post-16-related points included in the SEA's Manifesto for Education, launched on 24/6/23. (The S.E.A. is the Labour Party's affiliated society concerned with education.)**

Through its *Manifesto for Education*, the Socialist Education Association (SEA) has laid down a challenge to the Labour front bench to tackle the crisis in our education service by introducing radical change to reverse the years of damage done by the Tories. The *Manifesto* was put together by working groups, including on the curriculum and on HE/ Lifelong Learning, plus a conference on special needs. The final version was agreed by an all-member meeting.

The SEA believes that education is a universal right not a privilege, and that all educational institutions should share knowledge and skills. They should also assist in enlightening and interacting with their local communities. These communities are best served by inclusive democratic structures which enhance accountability to students, parents and carers, staff and trade unions. These socialist principles should apply to all sectors of the education service, from early years through to primary and secondary schools, FE colleges, universities and youth services.

Overall, the *Manifesto* therefore calls for a radically reformed education service, designed as part of a socialist programme to redistribute wealth, rejuvenate public services and tackle discrimination. This is required to break down the barriers that increasing numbers of children, young people and adults face.

Detailed proposals for change across the education service as a whole put forward in the *Manifesto* include (at post-16):

- Abolish tuition fees for further and higher education, end marketisation and bring back the Education Maintenance Allowance
- Rejuvenate youth services so that all young people have access to high quality provision
- Guarantee jobs to young people successfully completing apprenticeships
- Enable all learners to access education throughout their lives.

The SEA believes in Lifelong Learning, with the right of all people to:

- free education and training throughout their lives

- access high quality opportunities
- learn, train, and be employable
- develop themselves, their families and their communities.

It believes, further, that everyone should have the right to access higher education and life-long learning whatever their age or background. Education which is accessible throughout people's lives enhances the well-being and capacity of individuals to enjoy life, supports intergenerational aspiration and adds value to communities and workplaces. The higher education section of the *Manifesto* demands an end to tuition fees, marketisation and control by the Office for Students.

By FE, the SEA understands all providers of post-16 education, such as school 6th forms, sixth form colleges, general and specialist further education colleges, prison education, adult and community education, training providers, and higher education delivered through a further education context.

It sees FE thus defined as a public good, which, as well as helping to develop skills and the attainment of qualifications, improves the health and well-being of students through building confidence and providing opportunities, including second chances to those who did not progress in the past, or who have been failed by the system.

Within the overall context of Lifelong Learning, key priorities and actions proposed for FE by the *Manifesto* can be summarised as follows.

- It should support all people who experience barriers to learning, participation and inclusion, including young adult carers and those who have left - or are leaving - care.
- It should enable all students to mix vocational and academic qualifications in such a way as to maximise access for those from non-traditional backgrounds to HE, employment and beyond.

FE needs, therefore, to be significantly expanded. In particular, funding for more Level 1 and Level 2 courses for adult students is essential.

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***We reproduce here selected extracts from the S.E.A. Manifesto:***

**Under ‘Introducing Fair Assessment and New Qualifications’:**

Labour should introduce a baccalaureate/diploma/style qualification to incorporate as well as replace GCSEs, A-levels, BTECs, and T-levels. This will be delivered and assessed throughout the 14 to 19 phase. The qualification will recognise different levels of achievement rather than stigmatise failure. Assessments should be taken when students are ready. Students should be able to pick vocational, technical and academic elements which will be of equivalent value and be able to switch institutions at 16.’

**Under ‘Lifelong Learning’:**

‘Qualifications should all fit into the national qualifications framework so that learners can return to formal and informal education at any time in their lives. They should also be able to move across the framework to courses in areas that are new to them. The SEA believes that the academic vs technical and vocational debate is a false divide which diverts attention from what is really required to deliver Labour’s green policy agenda, namely:

- Investment in all qualifications whatever their level with credit transfer built into funding regimes.
- Student support systems which are accessible to potential students including those already in the workforce.
- Funding to develop new provision to increase participation at levels 4/5 and foundation years.
- Incentives to encourage collaboration with employers.
- Abolition of the Equivalent Level Qualification (ELQ) rules which require students to self-fund study for courses which are at the same or lower level to qualifications which they have already obtained. Provision of free access for adults to courses up to and including Level 3 including the right to retrain in new skills.’

**Under ‘Research’:**

A Labour Government must introduce a new research funding system which:  
Ensures that all not-for-profit universities receive research funding;  
Promotes collaboration and the joint use of research facilities.  
Supports regional needs, innovation and applied research.  
Addresses the casualisation of the academic workforce.’

**Under ‘Apprenticeships’:**

‘A Labour Government must have an ambitious strategy to promote apprenticeships at every level. As a priority, Labour must:

- Simplify the apprenticeship system and levy to encourage the involvement of small employers as part of a skills and growth strategy.
- Use the opportunity to reform the apprenticeship system to support Labour’s Green Prosperity agenda.
- Ensure that, when allocating funds, employers are committed to developing apprenticeships with jobs, particularly for young people, at the end of the training.
- Support Level 2 and 3 apprentices with funding for travel and other costs associated with their apprenticeship.
- Ensure that employers, colleges, universities, and trade unions are involved in the development of apprenticeships at local level. Explore the potential for apprenticeship training boards focused on specific sectors.’

**Under ‘Further Education’:**

Labour should:

‘Devolve decision making and funding for local skills strategies, the provision of post-16 and adult education, job centres and return to work programmes and the monitoring/oversight of all providers to local democratically accountable bodies in collaboration with employers, unions, HE and education and training providers.

Reverse cuts to post-16 education and training made since 2010. Ensure funding can support pay comparability between FE staff and the school sector, the recruitment and upskilling of staff to meet the changing needs of the economy, enhanced contact time for all students, a common, broad wrap-around curriculum, and a third post-16 year for those who need it.

... Bring back the governance of FE colleges to local democratic oversight.’

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