Mind the Gap
Tackling Educational Inequality in Scotland

A challenge paper by Scottish Labour

Press briefing, 6 May 2014
The Scottish Parliament
Foreword - Johann Lamont MSP, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party

Nelson Mandela boldly proclaimed ‘education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world’. As someone who did change the world, and make it a better place, it is always worth noting his wise words. I have first-hand experience of the power of education, perhaps not in changing the world, but certainly in changing people’s lives.

As a teacher in Rothesay, Springburn and Castlemilk, I saw how young people’s lives could be transformed by the opportunity to learn. But I also saw the barriers that prevent too many children achieving their potential.

Those pupils who sat before me had their whole lives in front of them. They were eager to learn, eager to get on and eager to work together to achieve their dreams.

I also met children whose ambitions were stifled almost before they were born, children whose eyes were already beginning to show signs of hopelessness, particularly in those dark days in the Thatcher years, when a job and a future look bleak.

It was my job as a teacher to support these children, to make them believe in themselves, to help them achieve their potential.

But we know that for too many young people, the barriers to opportunity make this impossible despite the best efforts of teachers like me.

It still goes on to this day, and we are all the poorer for that wasted potential. The failure to give these young people the opportunity to play their full part in our society, our economy, and our future, hurts us all as a country.

So as the leader of a party with an unswerving commitment to social justice, I know that arming these young people with the skills and confidence to make the best of themselves has to be one of our ambitions.

Breaking down barriers, not building borders has always been the Labour way.

That is why I am delighted that Jackie Baillie, our social justice spokesperson, and Kezia Dugdale, our education spokesperson, have been working with our social justice sounding board to look at this key area.

Their findings will inform our approach as we look to build a Scottish education system that gives our brightest and best the opportunity to drive our economy in the future, but also ensure everyone gets to play their part, regardless of their background or circumstances.

From early year’s intervention to second chance learning, it’s vital that we bring to bear real focus on the future of education – the future of Scotland depends on it.

Johann Lamont MSP
Leader, Scottish Labour Party
May 2014
Preface – Ewan Aitken, Chair of the Social Justice Sounding Board

When Johann Lamont asked me to chair Scottish Labour’s Social Justice Sounding Board, I was both excited and daunted; excited because the issues on its agenda were the issues that took me into the Labour Party over 30 years ago and daunted because there was still so much to do. That was why I was pleased when it was agreed that we take this journey step by step; looking at specific aspects of our life as a nation where we saw social injustices being perpetrated and focus in on them. That is not to say that we ignore the connections with other areas of work. The subject of this paper is educational inequality, a subject intrinsically linked to the way we live as families and communities and to our wider priorities as a society. It is indeed true to say that “a report card on public education is a report card on the nation.” That is why, as with the previous paper on child poverty, this paper takes a holistic approach to closing the educational achievement gap. This has happened at least in part as an example of the Sounding Board doing its job; challenging Scottish Labour to think big and make connections that will bring new synergies to old problems.

For any policies to work they need to say not just what will be done, but what those who promoted them believe about why they should be done. What are the moral or ethical frameworks that have shaped the policies being promoted by any given political party? What do those policies say about how that party views the human relationships that are the lifeblood of our society? Do they believe in mutuality or individuality? Do they believe in community and compassion, or markets and money, being the basis of how we find our humanity? Any political programme needs to speak to the heart as well as the head. It needs to tell a deeper story than simply what will be done – it needs to say why it matters so much that it is done – for all our sakes, not just those affected directly. When you read this paper you should know what it is that drives Scottish Labour, what it believes in and how those beliefs shape its view on what a just Scotland should look like.

The task of the Sounding Board is to challenge, question and interrogate Scottish Labour’s views, ideas, evidence and assumptions, using the huge range of experience that the members of the board bring to the table. Our role is independent of the internal decision-making structures. We are free to say what we think about their thinking. That alone is our role. It is Scottish Labour’s task to decide what to do about what we have said when they reach their conclusions.
It says a great deal about the ethos of Scottish Labour that it wishes to build its major policies out of debate, discussion, experience and even disagreement. This process values diversity as a starting point for a new direction. That’s why it is different. That’s why I think that it will work.

I am grateful to my fellow Sounding Board members for their work so far and also to all those who have contributed to the process. There remains much to be done but the journey has begun and I continue to be excited by its potential.

Rev. Ewan Aitken
Chair, Social Justice Sounding Board
May 2014
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Executive summary

This challenge paper sets out Scottish Labour's policy priorities to address educational inequality in Scotland. In common with our earlier challenge paper on child poverty, this represents only a staging post in our wider policy journey, one arrived at following extensive consultation with experts in educational policy and the wider field of social justice.

The objective of this paper, as with all the work produced in conjunction with the Social Justice Sounding Board, is not to set out a definitive set of conclusions, but to give an overview of educational inequality in Scotland, illustrating the progress we have made, identifying and acknowledging the work still to be done, and setting out what we believe to be the correct course for the future.

We have looked to past examples of successful policy innovations, both in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. We have also looked at education and early education and care (ECEC) systems elsewhere in Europe, to see how we may do things differently and highlight the cultural challenges this would entail.

In the course of our meetings with the Social Justice Sounding Board and our seminar on educational inequality, a number of themes recurred, the most salient of which was the need for a consistent and holistic approach to addressing educational inequality, one that engages children, parents, schools and communities. We need to be honest and realistic about the implications of such an approach, both in terms of cost and culture. Our twelve policy priorities are:

1. Focusing resources and preventative spending on the crucial early years of a child’s life, from pre-birth to school starting age.

2. Building relationships between families, schools and communities so that parents have access to a general support network allowing them to learn from the knowledge and experience of neighbours, friends, teachers and professionals.

3. Working to ensure that parents with a negative experience of the educational system are encouraged to engage in their child’s educational development by engendering a positive and welcoming atmosphere in preschool and school settings.
4. Investing in a state owned system of high quality, flexible and affordable childcare that gives children the best chance to enter school on an equal footing and suits the needs of parents.

5. Expanding the provision of high quality “wraparound care” for primary school pupils, such as the provision of breakfast clubs and homework clubs, affording pupils a productive start and end to the school day whilst suiting the needs and requirements of working parents.

6. Ensuring that the Curriculum for Excellence is correctly implemented across primary and secondary schools, and facilitating greater educational integration, choice and freedom for pupils of all backgrounds by guaranteeing that they have access to a wide selection of subjects and courses, including college run vocational courses.

7. Enshrining a commitment to raising achievement and closing the achievement gap in the plans and outcomes of local authorities, schools, government agencies and central Government.

8. Fostering an evidence-based approach wherein all policies and innovations aimed at tackling educational inequality are monitored and evaluated, and ensuring that those with a proven record of success are rolled out across the country.

9. Continuing the task begun in the McCrone Agreement of raising standards in the teaching profession by recruiting teachers from amongst our top graduates, strengthening Continuing Professional Development and investigating the reintroduction of Chartered Teacher Status.

10. Increasing the number of supply teachers and administrative staff to ensure that teachers are free to teach and are not weighed down by bureaucracy.

11. Creating a national performance database, with free access to parents, teachers, local authorities and educational professionals.

12. Promoting participation in our schools by investigating the removal of barriers to inclusion such as the cost of school trips and after school activities.
Part 1 – Introduction

A. Creation of the Sounding Board

1. Johann Lamont has laid out the challenge of creating greater fairness and social justice in Scotland. In her first speech to Scottish Labour Conference, following her election as Party Leader, she said:

“I mean a world where what you can be is more important than where you come from. And I mean a world where a politicians’ budget matches their claim to care. I mean a world where caring for your loved ones is regarded as a common good to be supported not a welfare benefit to be cut.”

2. To help meet this challenge, a Social Justice Sounding Board was established to take forward a programme to develop Scottish Labour’s plans to make those words a reality, beginning with the issue of child poverty in Scotland.

3. It was decided that the Sounding Board would not be a conventional Commission that simply received evidence. It was believed that a truly radical and innovative approach was needed – a forum in which ideas would be aired in a more free, thoughtful and long-term way. Scottish Labour did not just want to listen to leading opinion – we wanted to engage with it. The Sounding Board was created with the intention of enabling Scottish Labour to test its ideas and to receive feedback from those with experience and passion for their area of expertise.

4. The next step was to appoint a Chair of the Sounding Board, who would play an independent role in shaping Scottish Labour’s approach, and help inform the development of our approach to social justice. We were delighted that Ewan Aitken agreed to fulfil this role. Following this, experts in the field were approached to participate in the work of the Sounding Board, and it was made clear from the outset that they would do so in an independent capacity.

B. External engagement

5. The Sounding Board is itself an exercise in external engagement. This engagement is an integral part of developing an understanding of the policies required to address issues surrounding social justice.
6. After a successful seminar on child poverty in January 2013, a second seminar on educational achievement was organised in October 2013 at the Church of Scotland offices. It was decided that, in order to get the most out of the event, there should be a balance between professional opinion and frontline expertise at the meeting. A number of the Board’s members, including the Chair, attended the seminar as observers.

7. Representatives from the following organisations attended the event: The seminar was attended by a range of stakeholders, including NSPCC, Save the Children, Action for Children Scotland, Children in Scotland, Aberlour, Who Cares? Scotland, the Child Poverty Action Group, NUS Scotland, the Co-operative Education Trust Scotland, Children 1st, and the Poverty Alliance. The Seminar also took evidence from Sir Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, and the academic and education commentator, Keir Bloomer.

8. The Board’s discussions have focused on three key themes: Family, Community and School. Children spend only 15 per cent of their week at school (and then only for 40 weeks of the year) yet schools are often expected to shape the attitudes, beliefs and values of our young people, in addition to ensuring that they are well-versed in literacy, numeracy, and the other subjects that make up the curriculum. Whilst we need to ensure that the 15 per cent of time in school is well spent, schools do not act alone, and cannot be expected to deliver alone. As a society, we have a collective responsibility to ensure that the other 85 per cent of a child’s week offers the same consistency of values and equality of opportunity that we expect our schools to provide. To quote the American educationalist Ernest Boyer: “A report card on public education is a report card on the nation. Schools can rise no higher than the communities that support them.”

9. The seminar generated many ideas. These were noted and then circulated in a paper to members of the Sounding Board, along with a paper distilling down policy priority areas. These priority areas were discussed and then further refined at a subsequent meeting of the Sounding Board.

1 http://www.scotedreview.org.uk/pdf/335.pdf
10. The evidence gathered by the Board generated many ideas and identified a number of recurrent themes.

- Several contributors criticised the “deficit” approach of attempting to address educational inequalities once they have already arisen, advocating instead a greater emphasis on prevention.

- The quality of teaching was overwhelmingly perceived as superceding class size as an important influence on pupil performance, with several contributors stating that the current commitment to reducing class sizes should be abandoned in order to free up resources for more effective interventions.

- Many contributors strongly advocated a more equitable distribution of financial resources, arguing that we must be “hard-edged” about the cost to society of failing to give sufficient support to deprived children and communities.

- A number of contributions focused on the need for pre-school interventions built around focused community hubs. It was felt that these hubs should offer support to parents as a matter of course, not as a consequence of any perceived “problem”, but due to the recognition of the myriad challenges that good parenting entails.

- Policymakers were encouraged to be radical, to empower communities and to risk different models of governance to achieve that empowerment.

C. How this report fits into Scottish Labour’s future plans

11. This challenge paper is the culmination of activity so far – as such, it is not so much an end-point as a staging post. The objective with this paper is to show the progress we have made to date, invite further discussion, and set out what we believe to be the right approach to tackling child poverty in Scotland. In doing so, Scottish Labour seeks to promote and develop a better understanding of educational achievement, an understanding shaped by our commitment to the values of social justice, the
major challenges that we face, and the ideas and innovations that we believe will address these challenges.

12. Accordingly, the second chapter of this paper gives a brief history of education policy since devolution, contrasting Labour’s record in government to that of the SNP and identifying the major political fault lines. The third chapter offers an explanation and examination of educational Scotland, and compares the situation in Scotland with that across the UK and in other countries in the OECD. The fourth analyses the challenge we face in reducing educational inequality, with specific regard to three overarching themes: community; family and school. Finally, the fifth chapter examines the merits of a number of different policy options, and foregrounds our response to the challenge in a series of recommendations that will form the basis for future Scottish Labour policy.

13. We believe that social justice and a strong economy are two sides of the same coin. Inequality ultimately encumbers economic growth and hurts our neighbor in the process. A more equal society means what we have is better shared amongst each of us as neighbours, creating the opportunity for economic growth which makes the best use of the talent and potential of us all. The pursuit of social justice and reducing inequality, as a consequence, should underpin everything that the political process seeks to achieve. This paper will serve as a platform for the next phase of our work, and feed into our other economic and social policies.
Part 2: Educational Achievement: record

A. Expectation and innovation: a brief history of Scottish Labour in office

14. When Donald Dewar became First Minister in 1999, he promised to “build on the commitment to social justice; which lies at the heart of political and civic life in Scotland.” Fittingly, for a country that has always placed a premium on education – even in the early 1990s under the Conservatives spending on education was around 30% higher per capita than the UK average – Scottish Labour articulated this through its innovative approach to education policy.

15. Scottish Labour’s educational objectives were twofold: to raise the general level of achievement through increased public investment; and to reduce inequality through the provision of additional resources to assist pupils from deprived backgrounds. The first session of the Parliament, from 1999-2003, saw significant developments in school education - in legislation, policy development, and teachers’ pay and conditions.

16. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 was the first major Scottish education Act since the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Among other things, it introduced a right to education, a presumption of mainstream provision and statutory national priorities. The Act also saw the introduction of a statutory entitlement to 412 hours of childcare a year for all 3 and 4 year-olds in Scotland. Other legislation was concerned with disability strategies, changes to the Scottish Qualifications Authority, amendments to school age and changes to teachers’ career structure.

17. The McCrone Agreement addressed poor morale and failing standards in the teaching profession by offering vastly improved pay and conditions and placing a renewed emphasis on career development. It did so through the introduction of Chartered Teacher Status and Advance Teacher Status, the intention of which was to encourage teachers to excel in the profession, and share their expertise with others. The Agreement was successful in raising educational standards and professional morale, improving conditions, and boosting participation in the profession. In the years following devolution the number of teachers rose steadily, peaking in 2007 at 52,446, just short of a self-imposed target of 53,000.
18. Labour built on its record by launching a National Debate on education in 2002 to consider the “big questions” on the future of school education in Scotland. The debate created a space for politicians and professionals to consider particular policy areas which arose during the first parliamentary session. This resulted in a commitment from the Executive to review the school curriculum, end the system of national tests for 5-14 year-olds, and increase vocational skills and subject choice for 14-16 year-olds. The Executive’s Ambitious, Excellent Schools policy document (Scottish Executive 2004) is a core document in this respect and sets out an agenda for modernisation. Together with the National Debate, it laid the groundwork for the Curriculum for Excellence, which outlines the purposes and principles of education from ages 3 to 18 in Scotland.

19. The Curriculum for Excellence heralded a departure from a utilitarian valuation of education as depending purely on rote learning and exam performance. It is a departure we welcome: primary and secondary education should foster the growth of pupils as human beings, producing responsible, confident and compassionate adults who will contribute to society on a social, emotional, practical and financial basis. However, the journey from articulation to realisation is long and arduous, and we are still in the early stages.

20. Labour’s second parliamentary session saw the passage of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. It introduced a new concept of 'additional support needs', and established a new framework for supporting children and young people with such needs. Also passed was the Joint Inspection of Children’s Services and Inspection of Social Work Services (Scotland) Bill (2006), which enabled joint inspections of children’s services, including schools. Both Acts reflected a wider move to promote the integration of children’s services replicated in other developments (for example, the Health Promoting Schools programme).

21. Another significant aspect of the integration agenda was ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ (GIRFEC), a holistic, inter-agency guide to working with children and young people which places wellbeing at the heart of children’s services. GIRFEC has proved highly influential; it established a set of principles and values upon which all subsequent policy has been based, including the Early Years Framework and the
Curriculum for Excellence. Much of the evidence the Board received suggested that this holistic, inter-agency approach should be applied more widely.

B. Class sizes and teacher numbers – the SNP since 2007

22. Since taking office in 2007, the Scottish Government has been relatively cautious in its approach to education policy. Although it has introduced the Early Years Framework and continued with the implementation of GIRFEC and the Curriculum for Excellence, the SNP Government has failed to meet self-imposed targets on childcare provision, class sizes and free school meals, and has arguably prioritized higher education at the expense of innovation in the early years. This top heavy approach is somewhat at odds with the principles of early intervention.

23. In 2007, the SNP pledged to introduce a minimum class size of 18 pupils for all primary 1 to 3 classes. When this was exposed as unachievable, the target was downgraded to 11,000 further children in class sizes of 18 pupils or fewer. The most recent Government statistics show that the number of P1-P3 pupils educated in classes of 18 pupils or fewer peaked at 34,351 in 2010 but have fallen sharply over recent years. In 2013, 22,992 children were taught in classes of 18 pupils or fewer, a figure lower than in 2007, when 23,563 children were educated in classes of 18 pupils or fewer.2

24. The SNP manifesto for the 2007 Scottish Parliament election pledged to maintain teacher numbers, even in the face of falling school rolls. However, teacher numbers have decreased since 2007: in 2013, there were 8,826 fewer FTE (full time equivalent) school-based teachers than when the SNP took office in 2007. The decline in the number of secondary school teachers has outpaced the reduction in the school roll, falling by 2,878 since 2007, whilst the number of primary school teachers has declined by 924 since 2007, despite an increase in the school roll. The number of FTE pre-school teachers has also fallen, from 1,689 in 2007 to 1,288 in 2013.3

25. The SNP’s 2007 manifesto also pledged to increase entitlement to free pre-school education for 3 to 4 year-olds from 412.5 to 600 hours. However, they only

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succeeded in increasing entitlement to 475 hours, and in 2009 abandoned plans to increase entitlement to 570 hours\(^4\) (although the target of 600 hours has now been reprised under the Children and Young People Bill). As matters stand, there are wide variations in childcare costs across Scotland’s local authorities; however, in general terms, it is expensive and in short supply.\(^5\) 40% of Scottish local authorities are unaware if they have sufficient childcare provision for working parents, and others reported shortages of provision for older children, disabled children and parents who work full time.\(^6\)

26. The SNP Government has also ended the Chartered teacher scheme, an important aspect of the McCrone Agreement which affirmed and enhanced classroom excellence and offered teachers an opportunity to progress in their career as a classroom teacher.

C. Overview: the impact of education policy since devolution – the reality

27. Scottish Labour believes that there is much to be positive about in Education and Early Years in the context of devolution. However, despite the many admirable policy initiatives assayed, the dual goals of alleviating educational inequality and significantly increasing educational achievement have proven elusive.

28. Although Scotland’s devolved education system compares relatively favorably to those in the rest of the UK, we have a number of significant concerns. For example, whilst A-level and GCSE attainment in England has increased rapidly over the last few years, pupil attainment in Scotland has stagnated. More concerning still, there are large numbers of Scottish children leaving school without sufficient qualifications for entry into higher education. However, the most serious issue – common across the UK and the OECD - concerns the high levels of inequality that still exist across all stages of the Scottish education system.

29. The scale of the challenge is, therefore, abundantly clear. The following chapters will feature a more detailed examination of educational achievement and will delineate the various ways in which we can bridge the educational divide. Our key point


\(^5\) According to Children in Scotland, in 2012 childcare costs for over 5s (i.e. out of school care) averaged £50.46 per week, higher than in England and Wales and a 3.9% increase on 2011. In addition, there are fewer childcare places per 100 children in Scotland (19.7 per 100) than in England (24.4 places), although this is likely to reflect differences in supply and demand in rural and remote communities.

\(^6\) Children in Scotland, Members’ Briefing: Scottish Childcare Costs Report 2013, July 2013
remains that, for schools to be able to do the task society requires of them, the change in culture and outlook must transcend the classroom.

Part 3: Educational Achievement: what is it and why it matters?

A. What is the educational achievement gap?

“The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people.” Jimmy Reid

Societies are like houses: without secure foundations, they are apt to crumble. We know instinctively that we must protect, nurture and educate our children in their earliest years, when they are at their most receptive and their most vulnerable. The first 1000 days of a child’s life helps to determine their future learning capacity, their ability to make sound judgements and develop good relationships with those around them. Science bears this out. The portions of the brain which control vision, hearing and language development start developing and peak before a child reaches the age of 18 months. By the age of 3, 50 per cent of our language is established, and by five, 85 per cent.

B. Which children are most likely to suffer from educational inequality?

Children from deprived backgrounds

A child’s level of educational achievement is largely determined by origins. The same could be said of education: the nature of the family environment; the socio-economic classification and level of household income; and the extent of parental education – all help to define a child’s future prospects. If the environment is stable, warm and nurturing, free from emotional and material deprivation, a child’s chances will be greatly enhanced. However, if a child lacks these things, and, crucially, if a child lacks security, attention and a sense of coherence, than that child’s life-chances may be irrevocably damaged.

Deacon, Joining the Dots
32. Education is rightly said to open doors, but it also closes them. The doors begin to close at pre-school age and continue to close until school-leaving age, at which point many low-achieving children will be confronted by a stark and barren landscape bereft of optimism and opportunity. Unless we address the gap in educational achievement we risk abandoning further generations of children to this fate, and likewise entrenching existing social and economic fault lines.

33. The Millennium Cohort Study conducted in 1997 found that by age 3, children from disadvantaged families lag a full year behind their middle class contemporaries. Conversely, by age 5, children from more affluent families who had low cognitive ability at age 2 have almost caught up with higher ability children from poorer families. Children from more deprived backgrounds are therefore less ready for school and less able to take advantage of the resources invested in the universal education system.

34. The correlation between early development and future achievement is illustrated by the following table, which shows the percentage of 26 year-olds achieving educational and vocational qualifications against their position in early development scores at age 5.

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Looked after children

35. In 2012, the Scottish Parliament’s Education and Culture Committee completed a report into the educational outcomes of looked after children. The report reached some damning conclusions regarding the extent to which the state is failing in its role as corporate parent. The evidence of this failure can be seen in the disproportionate number of looked after children who become offenders. Indeed, a 2013 Barnado’s Scotland project found that 88% of inmates of Polmont Young Offenders Institution had been in care.\(^9\)

Boys

36. Over the past 3 years, girls have consistently outperformed boys, and the gap is widening. In 2008/09, the average tariff score for girls was 382, 51 points higher than the average score for boys (331). By 2011/12 the gender gap had increased to 60 points, with the average tariff score for girls 437 points, and the average tariff score for boys 377.\(^{10}\) This trend is borne out by a gender-based analysis of university

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admissions. The table below shows the increased probability of applying to university by the age of 19 of 18 year-old women compared to 18 year-old men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased probability of applying for females compared with males</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Sutton Trust

**Ethnic minorities**

37. In general terms, and despite being more likely to be living in poverty than those in the wider population, pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds fare relatively better than the majority of white pupils, with pupils of Chinese origin achieving a tariff score well above average. However, a report from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission on the experiences of Gypsy Traveller communities found “negative and non-inclusive attitudes” towards Gypsy Travellers across Scottish public services, including education. According to the report, only 20 per cent of Gypsy Traveller children of secondary school age regularly attend school, with common themes in Gypsy Traveller experiences of education including racial harassment, an increased likelihood of bullying and exclusion, lack of validation of Gypsy Traveller culture in the school and across the educational curriculum, low expectations of teachers, and a negative impact on schools’ willingness to admit pupils from Gypsy Traveller communities.

C. **Measuring the gap**

**Pre-School children**

38. Experiences during the formative 0-3 period strongly influence a child’s emotional, physical and mental health, competency in literary and numeracy, and even future economic productivity. As well as having a significant individual benefit, investment
in the early years has wider social and economic benefits. International research has shown that returns on Early Years expenditure include reduced use of special education services, reduced involvement in juvenile delinquency, reduced welfare and dependency costs, reduced criminal justice costs, and an increase in tax contributions.\textsuperscript{11}

39. By the age of 3, children from deprived backgrounds are already starting to fall behind in terms of cognitive development. Figure 2A shows the Mean standards vocabulary ability across five household income quintiles for children at the ages of 3 and 5. As we can see, at age 3, children from the most deprived quintile have already fallen below average and are far behind children from the least deprived quintile. This gap remains relatively constant over the next 2 years.

![Figure 2A](image)

Source: Scottish Government

40. *Growing Up in Scotland: Changes in Child Cognitive Ability in the Early Years* (June 2011)\textsuperscript{12} is part of a longitudinal project commissioned in 2003, funded by the Scottish Government and conducted by the Scottish Centre of Social Research. The aim of the study is to track the lives of several cohorts of Scottish children through the early years and beyond. The most recent data, from June 2011, showed that children from higher income households, those whose parents have higher educational qualifications, and those with higher socio-economic classifications, have

\textsuperscript{11} ibid

\textsuperscript{12} Bradshaw, P. (2011) *Growing Up in Scotland: Changes in child cognitive ability in the pre-school years*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
better vocabulary and problem solving scores, on average, at both ages than children whose parents have lower incomes, lower educational qualifications and are in lower socio-economic classifications.\footnote{See figures 2A, 2B and 2C in the accompanying dataset.}

41. The largest differences in ability are between children whose parents have higher and lower educational qualifications.\footnote{To put this in context, the most recent Scottish Household Survey reported that 21\% of Scottish adults have no educational qualifications and that those with lower qualifications are (predictably) more likely to have lower incomes. \url{http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Scottish-Household-Survey-372.aspx}} At age 5, compared with children whose parents have no qualifications, those with a degree educated parent are around 18 months ahead on vocabulary and 13 months ahead on problem-solving ability. Of the three social background characteristics considered, parental level of education was most strongly associated with change in cognitive ability between ages 3 and 5, with children whose parents had higher qualifications more likely to see their ability improve.

**School age children**

**Primary Education**

42. As noted above, the Labour-led Scottish Executive abolished statutory testing of 5-14 year-olds. This approach reflects similar decisions in countries such as Finland where age and stage testing is limited to the final two years of secondary education. However, the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy measures the numeracy, reading and writing ability of pupils at P4, P7 and S2.

43. The most recent numeracy survey, undertaken in 2013 and published in April 2014, identified a distinct correlation between performance and background. At P4, 61 per cent of pupils from the most deprived backgrounds were assessed as performing either well or very well, compared to 75 per cent of pupils from the least deprived backgrounds. Although performance levels decline across all three deprivation groupings over subsequent years, the gap between the most and least deprived increases exponentially: by S2, pupils from the least deprived areas were just over twice as likely to be assessed as performing either well or very well than pupils from the most deprived areas with 52 per cent from the least deprived compared to 25 per cent of the most.
The first literacy survey, undertaken in 2012, also established a link between performance and background. At P4, the percentage of pupils living in the least deprived areas and assessed as performing well or very well in reading was 17 per cent higher than for pupils living in the most deprived areas; at P7 level, the gap narrowed slightly to 14 per cent; at S2 level, it widened to 16 per cent. Assessment of writing performance found similar outcomes: the percentage of writing scripts showing pupils performing well at, very well at or beyond the relevant level was 21 percentage points higher for pupils living in the least deprived areas than for those living in the most deprived areas. This gap was consistent across all three stages of assessment.

Secondary education: standardised qualifications

By the time pupils reach formal qualifications, the disparity in performance between the least and most deprived pupils is further entrenched and increasingly intractable. The average tariff score of school leavers shows a persistent and pronounced gap in achievement between pupils in the lower and higher quintiles of the SIMD.

In 2011, 250 of the most deprived 20 per cent of Scottish 5th year pupils achieved 3 A’s or more at Higher. This represents just 5.6 per cent of the total number of pupils who received 3 A’s or more. In the same year, 1771 of the least deprived 20 per cent

Source: Scottish Government
of Scottish 5th year pupils achieved 3 A’s or more at Higher. This represents 40 per cent of the total number of pupils who received 3 A’s or more. In 2011/12 the average tariff score for the most deprived 20 per cent was 268, compared to an average tariff score of 552 for the least deprived 20 per cent. The table below compares the average tariff scores of the most and least deprived 20 per cent of school leavers.

![Average Tariff Scores of School Leavers by SIMD, 2007/08 to 2011/12](chart)

Source: Scottish Government

47. The Scottish Government releases annual statistics recording educational outcomes for looked after children. The latest release (for 2011/12) illustrates that, in comparison with their peers, looked after children continue to have poorer educational achievement and outcomes. Between 2009/10 and 2011/12, the average tariff score for looked after children was consistently lower in comparison to all school leavers (although it is improving at a similar rate). In addition to this, although the performance of looked after children is improving at a faster rate than that of all school leavers, a significant gap remains: in 2011/12 75 per cent of looked after children were in positive destinations after leaving school (an 11 percentage point increase on 2010/11), compared to 90 per cent of all school leavers (a 1 percentage point increase on 2010/11). The disparity in average tariff scores between looked after children and all school leavers are illustrated below.

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15 See average tariff score of looked after children in accompanying dataset
Future destinations for school leavers

48. One of the Scottish Government’s flagship policies in recent years has been its commitment to maintain free access to higher education. Although on the face of it this policy would appear to be conducive to facilitating greater access to applicants from lower income backgrounds, the evidence suggests that this is not the case.

49. The Scottish School Leavers Survey (SSLS) compiles data on the destinations of school leavers in Scotland, broadly – and somewhat crudely – divided between positive and negative destinations. Positive destinations included entrance into further or higher education; employment; training; apprenticeships; and voluntary work. The survey indicates that over 90 per cent of school leavers achieve a positive destination.

50. However, if we take a more nuanced approach to the data, we quickly see that not all positive destinations are equal, and, moreover, that there is a strong link between affluence and outcomes. The graph below indicates that approximately 60 per cent of school-leavers from the least deprived areas enter higher education institutions, compared to less than 20 per cent of school-leavers from the most deprived areas.
Taking a closer look at admissions to higher education, we see that despite the Scottish Government’s decision not to introduce a fee-based system, Scotland trails behind the rest of the UK in recruiting students from poorer backgrounds, with 27.7 per cent of university entrants coming from more deprived areas, compared to a UK average of 30.7 per cent. In addition to this, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) states that “the majority of young people who [get] to university in Scotland are from middle class backgrounds, and in the most selective older universities, about 80 per cent of students are from professional and managerial backgrounds.”

The more prestigious the university, the lower the rate of social inclusion. In 2010, St Andrew’s admitted just 13 students from the most deprived backgrounds, 0.2 per cent of 7,370 undergraduates admitted; Edinburgh University admitted 91 students from the most deprived backgrounds (0.5 per cent of undergraduates); and Aberdeen admitted 51 students from the most deprived backgrounds (0.4 per cent of 12,195 undergraduates).

The benefits of securing access to higher education are myriad and far-reaching. Successful applicants have the opportunity to study to degree level, enhancing their

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16 [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2072&Itemid=141](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2072&Itemid=141)

critical faculties and developing a range of transferable skills. They also have access to an array of cultural, social, educational and employment opportunities, whilst the provision of gap years in industry, high quality careers advice, and regular graduate employment fairs enable aspiring undergraduates to lay the foundations of a successful career whilst still at university. The Browne Report (2010) estimated that over the course of a working life, the average graduate earns comfortably over £100,000 more than someone with A levels that does not attend university. Other studies indicate that the overall difference to lifetime earnings of a university degree could be as much as £600,000.18

54. The information on destinations shows that school-leavers from more deprived backgrounds are far more likely to enter further education than higher education. This makes the Scottish Government’s approach to the college sector, which has included consecutive years of cuts to the college revenue budget and the scaling-back of part time courses, somewhat perplexing, and difficult to reconcile with the objective of reducing overall levels of inequality. The reduction in college places will do nothing to increase the educational opportunities of those for whom university academia is not the best way for them to fulfil their potential.

55. Colleges have a valuable role to play in providing education and training that complements that on offer at universities, and should not be viewed as subordinate. Alongside institutions such as the Open University (a major innovation of Harold Wilson’s Labour Government in the 1970s) colleges offer learning and training opportunities to young people and adults of all ages, regardless of prior attainment.

D. Scotland on the world stage

(i) Scotland and the UK

56. According to a study by the London School of Economics, *Education in Devolved Scotland: A Quantitative Analysis* (March 2013), Scotland’s school pupils perform relatively well in comparison to those from England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

57. However, whilst the educational performance of Scottish pupils has remained relatively stable in recent years, the performance of pupils from the other UK nations

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18 Browne Report
has improved rapidly, with English school pupils have overtaking their Scottish counterparts against most indicators. Although the improvement in the rest of the UK may be in part due to “gaming” and grade inflation, this does not alter the fact that educational performance in Scotland has faltered in recent years, as can be seen from the table below.

![Figure 1: Education performance across the UK nations: compulsory age exams](image)

Source: ESRC

(ii) Scotland and the OECD

58. The Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) provides a comparative analysis of the educational achievement of pupils from countries within the Organisation of Economic and Community Development (OECD) and other partner nations.

59. PISA, along with more recent data compiled by the Sutton Trust, illustrates that the educational divide between high and low achievers from the most and least deprived areas remains at least as pronounced in Scotland as in other OECD countries.

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19 See education performance across the UK in accompanying dataset
60. Scotland’s PISA scores for 2012 were average, placing Scotland outside the top 20 countries assessed. Scotland scored marginally better than the rest of the UK countries in maths and reading, but less well in science. Whilst the gap between the performances of Scotland’s most and least deprived pupils reduced, the incidence of educational inequality was in line with the OECD average.

61. A recent study by the Sutton Trust revealed that, by the age of 15, high achieving boys from advantaged households in Scotland are almost 3 school years ahead of high achieving boys from the least advantaged households, placing Scotland at the bottom of the 32 OECD countries (one place above England).²⁰

E. Summary and conclusions

62. In summary, the evidence presented in this chapter shows that:

- Children from more deprived backgrounds are the disproportionate victims of educational inequality.

- The schism between the performance of, and outcomes for, the most and least deprived children begins at the pre-school cognitive development stage, and persists throughout formal education.

- By primary school age, children from deprived backgrounds are already behind on key cognitive and educational indicators.

- Pupils from more deprived backgrounds are far more likely to leave school earlier and with fewer qualifications; far less likely to enter higher education; will have considerably lower incomes over the course of their working lives; and will be a much greater risk of unemployment.

Conclusions

- We believe that interventions are most likely to be efficacious at the pre-school, 0-5 age group.

- These interventions should involve active engagement with families, communities and schools.

- School-based interventions should concentrate on ensuring that the needs of individual children are being addressed by the curriculum.

• Teachers should have the time and resources to identify struggling pupils at the earliest juncture, and the confidence, freedom, resources and expertise to take the appropriate mitigating action.

Part 4: Educational Achievement: challenges

A. Community

63. Traditionally, the Labour party is built upon the twin pillars of community and solidarity, each supporting the other and maintaining the whole. Communities are built on a shared experience of place and purpose and a common duty of care and compassion. Without community there is no solidarity, and without solidarity there is no longer a Labour party. In life, just as in politics, we believe in the strength of the collective.

64. If communities are vehicles of socialization; the breakdown of communities leads to atomization. Being part of a community helps us to form connections with those around us; research shows that complex patterns of social integration confers a 90 per cent increase in rates of survival. Conversely, those who become disconnected from others are more likely to experience adverse health, or fall prey to drugs and alcoholism.

65. Since the 1970s, the communities which once formed the bedrock of society in west central Scotland have fragmented. The closure of the shipyards instigated and exacerbated this decline, a decline compounded by the rise of Thatcherism and the insidious creed of selfish individualism. The widespread disintegration of manufacturing, heavy production and the mining industry saw this process of communal fragmentation replicated across Scotland. As a consequence, the shared sense of meaning, fellowship and purpose that once bound us together has been replaced by loneliness and alienation, poverty and hopelessness.

66. This has had a disproportionate impact on our children. In childhood, a sense of belonging and coherence aids survival even amid a general atmosphere of chaos. Coherence arises from social surroundings that offer care and aid comprehension.
Where coherence is absent, children experience life as so much noise and chaos, sound and fury, signifying nothing.  

B. Family

67. As a social structure, the family is similar to the community. Both are predicated on interaction. The interaction between a child and its parent – or other care giver – directly affects the development of the brain. It is essential that these interactions are positive. Positive interactions can be as basic as talking or reading to a child. On the other hand, the absence of positive interactions damages the brain, and hinders a child’s social, cognitive and emotional development.

68. A key ingredient to positive interactions is time. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the educational outcomes for children from more deprived families are inferior to those from more affluent backgrounds. Parents under financial strain have less material and emotional time to invest in their children. The pressure of making ends meet, often in low income jobs with anti-social, “flexible” working hours takes a toll on the parent, and concomitantly, the child.

69. One recurrent theme is that children from more deprived families suffer from “parental disengagement”; that is, their parents do not have the same expectations or aspirations for their child’s future as parents in more affluent families. We would dispute this. The number of families categorised as “socially dysfunctional” is much lower than the number of pupils experiencing educational disadvantage. This is not due to a lack of aspiration – many families are simply unable to translate their love and concern into material assistance. This could be ascribed to cultural disadvantage and a lack of “self-efficacy.”

70. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published a study examining the extent to which interventions focused on a specific set of Aspirations, Attitudes and Behaviours (AABs) can reduce the achievement gap.


22 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The role of Aspirations, Attitudes and Behaviour in Closing the Educational Attainment Gap, April 2012
The report found that whilst there is plentiful anecdotal evidence linking AABs with educational achievement, there is limited evidence and understanding regarding the exact nature of this relationship. A key finding of the report was that what could be interpreted as “low aspirations” may in fact be the result of negative experience – of both child and parent – and that what might be perceived as “parental disengagement” may in fact reflect a high level of parental commitment to a child’s education hampered by an inability to transmute that commitment into action.

We posit a symbiotic relationship between community and family. If we want to alter the educational and life chances of the children living in fractured communities across Scotland, we must give those communities the power, the wherewithal and the knowledge to shape their own destinies. We must enable families to work together, as a community, to make best use of their local schools and childcare services. We must ensure that parents get the resources and support they need to overcome social and economic barriers and re-engage with the education system.

Government policies in early intervention that aim to inform and enable parents, granting them the knowledge and tools to help their children realise their potential, could be effective in reducing the growth in the rich–poor gap that takes place over this time. We must, therefore, actively support and engage parents, with the recognition that this is less likely to be achieved in the school environment than through a concerted programme of community intervention.

C. Schools

Scottish Labour has always been a champion of state education, and we believe that interventions at primary and secondary school have an important role to play in narrowing the achievement gap. This may in part entail a change in culture and perception. We feel that the discourse surrounding educational achievement is in danger of becoming overly focused on the level of qualifications obtained by pupils, with a consequent risk that pupils who already struggle with low levels of self-esteem may be tainted by a sense of failure if they do not do well in exams. The deleterious impact on individual horizons of the Eleven Plus and selective schooling was in large part due to the fact that it gave rise to feelings of inferiority and subordinate status.
This is why we favour the term educational achievement (as opposed to educational attainment), which we regard as more reflective of the broad range of social, emotional, sporting and cultural accomplishments that the school environment provides. We believe that school is not solely about the attainment of formal qualifications; rather, schools have a vital role to play in transforming pupils from dependent children to responsible adults, equipped with the skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a rapidly changing world.

Part 5: Educational Achievement: vision

A. Bridging the educational divide

We believe that reducing educational inequality and raising educational achievement should be the central tenet of a wider programme of social justice. The highest performing education systems in the OECD are those that maintain high standards of education whilst removing the personal and social obstacles – such as social and economic background – that arrest social mobility. Equally, countries with better educated and more skilled individuals tend to enjoy higher levels of prosperity, lower levels of dependency, and to be less vulnerable to economic downturns.

It is important for us – and for wider society – to acknowledge that there are no easy solutions to closing the achievement gap; it will be very difficult to accomplish without the investment of significant funds, especially in Early Education and Childcare. Educational inequalities are deeply ingrained in culture and society; success will require knowledge, commitment, courage, and imagination. That said, any investment will reap dividends both now – by allowing parents (especially mothers) to return to work, thus contributing to the economy – and in the future – through vastly improved outcomes for children, especially those from deprived backgrounds. It is therefore in keeping with the Social Justice Sounding Board’s overall objective of ending societal inequality.

Investment in high quality child education and care is an investment in Scotland’s future. It enables public spending to become “developmental and not just
remedial”\textsuperscript{23}, with money spent recouped many times over through the creation of a
happier, healthier and more just society.\textsuperscript{24} Conversely, failure to invest in the early
years is likely to prove very expensive in the future. However, even the most
sophisticated and well-developed childhood education and development
programmes will be unable to address the educational achievement gap unless
complemented by the appropriate social and economic policies.

79. In the short term, investment in the pre-birth-5 age group can produce per-capita
savings from between £5,100 a year for a child with moderate needs to £37,400 a
year for a child with severe needs. In the medium term, effective intervention in the
pre-birth-8 age group could save up to £131 million per year across Scotland, whilst
failure to intervene could result in a nine fold increase in public spending. Overall, if
we could introduce effective early intervention measures resulting in a 10 per cent
reduction in spending on services further down the line, this could lead to a saving of
around £94,000 for each individual.

80. However, we are currently undergoing one of the most concerted periods of public
spending cuts in living memory. In England, David Cameron’s coalition Government
has presided over the closure of 500 Sure Start centres, a cut that will have dire
consequences for life-chances in some of the UK’s most deprived communities.

B. The way forward

81. We believe that if we are to make progress in the future we must learn from the
past, assessing in an objective manner the policy interventions that have been
undertaken in Scotland since devolution and those that have occurred in the rest of
the UK and further afield. A recurring theme in evidence to the Board was that whilst
there has been no lack of imaginative projects and innovations, many of these have
suffered from a lack of funding and an apparent reluctance to implement local
schemes on a national level. The approach has too often been piecemeal and
fettered by conservatism and caution.

82. The starting point, therefore, is to identify what has worked and what has not. The
Labour-led Scottish Executive was responsible for a number of thoughtful and

\textsuperscript{23} \url{http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/PDF%20reports/EarlyInterventionFirstEdition.pdf}
\textsuperscript{24} One Academic proponent of early intervention claims that “for every £1 that is invested between the years of birth-3 years,
somewhere between £3 and £14 is saved later on.” \url{http://archive.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/finance/reports-
11/fir11-01.htm#_ftn42}
effective interventions, and charities and local authorities have also launched programmes that have proven to be effective. For example, evidence suggests that projects such as reading clubs and learning initiatives for parents have been successful on a local level, but that there has been a failure to roll out these initiatives on a national scale, and many have now been discontinued. The previous Labour-led Scottish Executive established a number of programmes to encourage parents to read to children, such as the Home Reading Initiative.25

83. In the next section of this chapter, we will examine current policy across 3 areas: early years and childcare; parental engagement; and school education. We will then offer examples of policies and interventions with a proven track record of success, before outlining our vision for improving raising educational achievement in Scotland.

(i) Early Years Education and Care

84. Early Years Education and Care (ECEC) is a widely accepted term for all educational and care arrangements for children from birth to compulsory schooling, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content.26

85. The evidence presented in this paper is just a small sample of the vast array of literature produced on the importance of the early years to a child’s future development. In this paper, we have explained why we believe that families and communities have a vital role to play in raising levels of educational achievement and laying the foundations of happier, healthier, more equal and prosperous societies.

86. The Parliament has acknowledged the critical nature of the early years. The Early Years Framework, launched in December 2008, observed that “it is during our very earliest years and even pre-birth that a large part of the pattern for our future adult life is set.” Likewise, a 2011 Finance Committee Report on preventative spend emphasized the benefits to be accrued from early intervention.

87. The Scottish Government’s Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, recently passed by Parliament, aims to deliver 600 hours of statutory childcare to all 3 and 4

26 http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/starting-strong_9789264192829-en;jsessionid=d45p5snsdji33.x-oecd-live-01
year-olds in Scotland. However, the Bill contains no information on how greater flexibility – a recurrent demand of many parents – is to be introduced to the system. Without such flexibility, parents will continue to struggle to balance the competing demands of work and family. Moreover, the only provision aimed at the 0-2 age-group is a commitment to offer 600 hours of care for 3 per cent of disadvantaged 2 year-olds, to be extended to 27 per cent by 2015. From September 2014, 40 per cent of England’s 2 year-olds will be entitled to 570 hours of childcare.

88. According to the Scottish Government’s timetable, as outlined in the White Paper for Independence, “Scotland’s Future”, Scotland will not equal this until 2016 at the earliest. Given that this is a devolved policy area, this delay is difficult to justify; if we are to address educational inequality, we need a co-ordinated approach allied to a sense of common purpose. Political imperatives are – or should be – subordinate to the wellbeing and life chances of our children.

89. The importance of high quality childcare is evidenced by the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE) (undertaken in England in 2004), the first major European longitudinal study of a national sample of young children’s development between the ages of 3 and 7 years. The report found that:

- Pre-school experience enhances all-round development in children, with an earlier start (under age 3 years) related to better intellectual development;

- Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are a mixture of children from different social backgrounds;

- Some pre-school settings are more effective than others in promoting positive outcomes, with the quality of provision tending to be superior in settings integrating care and education.

90. Studies comparing full day attendance and half day attendance indicate that full-day pre-school results in higher test scores in literacy and numeracy for children from more deprived backgrounds. However, quality is the crucial factor: longitudinal

http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/e/eppe%20report%20pre%20school%20to%20end%20of%20key%20stage%201%20to%20summary.pdf
evidence suggests that children from low income backgrounds who attended a high quality early education and care setting tended to perform significantly better five years on than those that had not.

**Cultural context: lessons from Sweden**

91. The manner in which we care for our children is closely linked to the way in which we work. In any given country, the shape and pattern of labour is defined by social and cultural expectations. We may measure the work/life balance of any particular country according to its working patterns and the nature of the family benefits and parental leave it offers. According to this measure, some countries, such as the United States, could, in broad terms, be said to place work before family. Others, such as Sweden or Finland, could be said to place family before work. Tellingly, levels of inequality are far higher in the US than in Sweden or Finland.

92. Broadly speaking, Scotland’s working culture tends more to the transatlantic (weighted to work) than the Northern European (weighted to family). The female employment rate is 69.5 per cent (16-64); however, a high percentage of women – around 42 per cent – work part time. Working hours are longer than in many European countries, there are more lowly paid jobs and a greater emphasis on “flexible” shift patterns that can see a service sector employee begin work at 2pm and finish at 10pm. Statutory maternity leave is paid at 90 per cent of salary for six weeks and statutory paternity leave is for two weeks within the first 56 days of a child’s birth.

93. We may compare this to Sweden’s labour market and employment practices. In 2011, Sweden’s female employment rate (20-64) was higher than Scotland’s, at 77.3 per cent, and its part-time employment rate was much lower, at just 18.4 per cent. The working culture is also radically different; for example, some high profile Swedish employers are prepared to allow their employees to arrive early and leave early, or vice versa, depending on childcare commitments, as long as they are present between 10am and 3pm. All Swedish employees are eligible for parental leave. Two parents are eligible for 480 days leave, with 60 reserved for each parent and the remaining 360 intended to be split equally, but with flexibility to be
transferred between parents. In addition to this, women must take two weeks maternity leave either before or after birth, and fathers have a statutory entitlement to two weeks paternity leave. Leave is compensated at 80 per cent of earnings up to SEK 440,000 (£40,927) for parental leave, SEK 330,000 (£30,695) for maternity and temporary leave.

94. There is evidence Sweden’s generous leave entitlements incentivise female participation in the labour market, with most Swedish women waiting until they have secured full employment before having children (the average age for first time mothers is 28). The majority of Swedish parents use their paid parental leave, with most taken by mothers but around a quarter taken by fathers (male uptake has been increasing steadily in recent times). A “Gender Equality Bonus” acts as an additional incentive for fathers to take parental leave; if parents share all available leave equally, they qualify for an additional cash payment of up to SEK 13,500 (£1,256).

95. Scotland’s overall expenditure on families compares relatively favourably to that in other European countries. However, the way that money is deployed is different, with greater expenditure on servicing demand for childcare – through child tax credits, child benefits and working tax credits\(^{28}\) – than towards investing in the supply of high quality state-owned early education and care. This means that Scotland’s ECEC provision is diverse and inconsistent. Only 18 per cent is financed by the state, with the rest financed privately. Variations in cost – hourly rates in Scotland are amongst the highest in the UK – and accessibility have engendered a large market in “informal” care, with many children looked after by grandparents, friends, neighbours, nannies or siblings.\(^{29}\)

96. Swedish families receive a wide variety of support, including a child allowance; a large family supplement (an additional benefit payable to families with at least two children); a parent’s cash benefit (to be paid when a child is born or adopted to enable the parent to stay home with their child); a temporary parent’s cash benefit (for short periods of leave to care for a sick child); and a housing allowance (a mean-tested benefit for families with dependent children).

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\(^{28}\) The planned transition to Universal Credit will see these subsumed into one single payment.

\(^{29}\) Scottish Government, International childcare comparison, July 2013
There is arguably an over-emphasis in Scotland (and, indeed, the United Kingdom) on the limited provision of free ECEC at the expense of more generous affordable ECEC. Not only does this reduce accessibility to ECEC for children from more deprived communities, it results in all ECEC being focused on one age group, in this case 3 and 4 year-olds, around 96 per cent of whom currently receive access to free ECEC. The obsession with cost and quantity comes at the expense of consistency and quality. The diverse nature of supply means that the quality of care children receive varies between local authorities. Moreover, there is an ongoing dispute over whether the primary providers of ECEC should be registered teachers, or nursery nurses, who tend to be less qualified and receive lower salaries. In 2012, 65 per cent of three and four year-olds who attended preschool centre in Scotland had regular access to a registered teacher, with an additional 9.7 per cent having access on an ad hoc basis.

In contrast, Sweden has an integrated system of subsidised ECEC covering all children from 12 months to six years. 85 per cent of Swedish children in ECEC attend “preschool”, which offers year round full-day provision for all children age one to six. Since 2010, all Swedish children aged three to five have been entitled to 525 hours of free preschool per year. The vast majority of children attend preschool full time, so, in practical terms, the free entitlement entails a fee reduction for parents. Most of the ECEC provision is state owned, with 80 per cent run by municipalities and 19.5 per cent by independent providers. The cost of ECEC is heavily subsidised by local municipalities, funded in part through flat rate income taxes that differ across municipalities, and part through a block grant from central Government. Parental contribution to ECEC varies according to family income and the number of children attending ECEC, but cannot exceed three per cent of household income for the first child attending, two per cent for the second child, and one per cent for the third. 51 per cent of the ECEC workforce holds a university degree.

So, what does this tell us? Firstly, the scale, coverage and consistency of Sweden’s ECEC far surpass what is currently on offer in Scotland. Secondly, that Sweden’s ECEC is built on supply, with huge investment in state owned preschool and childcare centres. Thirdly, that Sweden’s taxation system, whilst less progressive than Scotland’s, raises considerably more in revenue, both locally and nationally, which it uses to heavily subsidise – although not pay for outright – ECEC. Fourthly, that
Sweden’s work/life balance is more equitable than Scotland’s, and it has made a concerted effort to encourage parents to split their parental leave more equally.

100. This illustrates the cultural barriers to achieving the kind of comprehensive, high quality, flexible and affordable ECEC that Scotland aspires to. Would we be prepared to pay more tax, both nationally and locally? Would we be able to alter our work patterns to make them more family friendly? Would we actively encourage a more equal split of parental leave between parents? Whilst we do not presume to answer these questions, they are certainly worth considering. On the other hand, we can look to examples from our own recent past to see how we may invest in a system of ECEC which suits our own professional and cultural circumstances.

**Examples of effective childcare provision: Sure start**

101. Although it has been lauded as “one of Labour’s most permanently transformative successes”, Sure Start was never properly implemented in Scotland. Instead, Sure Start money was parcelled out to local authorities, with little oversight of how it was spent. In England, 3,500 Sure Start centres were set up across the country. Whilst they were initially – and understandably – targeted at areas of greater deprivation (inaugural programmes were targeted at the 20% most deprived areas; it was calculated this would account for 51 per cent of all poor children)\(^30\), the eventual aim was to have a Sure Start centre in every community.

102. The best Sure Start centres were essentially community hubs, offering childcare, midwives, health visitors, speech and language therapists, family counsellors, parenting classes, drop-in advice services and back-to-work training for parents. They were designed to be used from pregnancy onwards, providing parents throughout the community with somewhere to go for help, advice and support, along with the more practical services on offer. Some Sure Start centres were attached to local primary schools; others offered after-school care and breakfast clubs for school children.\(^31\) Sure Start was bold, brave and innovative, an engine to drive social mobility that was adjudged by the Institute of Fiscal Studies to be one of the most effective Government policies of the last 30 years.\(^32\)

\(^30\)[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/sure_start_final_report_tcm8-20116.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/sure_start_final_report_tcm8-20116.pdf)
\(^32\)[http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/03/frank-field-poverty-unthinkable-sure-start](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/03/frank-field-poverty-unthinkable-sure-start)
(ii) Parental engagement

103. We believe that the vast majority of parents have high expectations for their children and want to help them achieve. However, some lack the agency to do so. We do not wish to be prescriptive or sanctimonious, or to lecture parents about what constitutes good and bad parenting. We recognise that all families are different, and that some parents are operating under severe strain and with limited time and financial resources.

104. We want to help parents help their children in the best possible environment. Research into the impact of parenting suggests that the most effective parental involvement programmes with the most significant impact on educational achievement are those that help parents support their children’s learning in the home, where they spend the vast majority of their time.

105. Parental engagement in their child’s educational development can take a number of forms. Engagement includes active and regular communication between parent and child and the creation of a good learning environment. Support with learning at home, including help with homework, encouragement, and the fostering of positives values and good behaviour, are crucial to a child’s educational, social and emotional development. Equally, attending parents’ evenings or participating in external activities such as volunteering on school trips or attending school concerts, allows parents to become active participants in their child’s life whilst lessening the risk of educational and social isolation. This not only builds bonds between parent and child, but between parent, child, school and community.

Examples of effective parental engagement: FAST

106. The Families and Schools Together (FAST) programme was developed by Middlesex University and is administered by the children’s charity Save the Children and is currently operating in 7 out of Scotland’s 32 local authorities. FAST seeks to redress the achievement gap by building stronger relationships between parents, children, teachers and communities, affording children the chance to fulfil their potential. FAST has three principal aims:
• helping children succeed at school by improving behaviour, supporting better home-school relationships, and improving educational achievement in reading, writing and maths.

• strengthening families by improving attachment between parents and their children, improving communication and building parents’ confidence

• strengthening communities by building trust between parents and reducing social isolation.

The programme operates across 3 phases:

• The first is focused on community outreach, including the formation of a multi-agency delivery team including FAST facilitators, parents, members of school staff and community-based partners such as health and social workers. The team invites families to participate on a voluntary basis.

• The second phase is an 8 week course to cultivate relationships between parents and their children, parents and the school, and parents and other parents. The weekly sessions include a family meal; communication games within the family; time for parents to talk to other parents; and one-to-one time between parent and child.

• In the third phase parents meet every month for 22 months, with sessions led by parents who have graduated from an 8 week FAST course plan, with support from the school.

107. An analysis of FAST by Middlesex University\textsuperscript{33} reported a range of significant outcomes, including improved family functioning; reduced risk of educational failure, with 88 per cent of parents reporting that they felt more able to support their child’s educational needs; enhancing of social networks and informal support, with 74 per cent of parents stating that they had more friends and more local support.

\textsuperscript{33}See FAST UK aggregate report: http://www.mdx.ac.uk/Assets/MDX%20FASTUK%20aggregate%20evaluation%20Oct%202010.pdf
(iii) School education

108. Since 2007, the Scottish Government has invested great time, effort and (in terms of the budget passed on to local authorities) money in lowering class sizes, especially in the first 3 years of primary education. However, we know that class size matters much less than teacher quality. It is arguable that no one performs a more valuable role in society than our teachers.

109. The McCrone Agreement recognised that a good salary and a sense of self-worth contribute to a teacher’s performance. Likewise, it acknowledged that good quality teaching depends on teachers being free to teach. Given the difficulties that have been encountered with implementing the Curriculum for Excellence, this is perhaps more the case now than at any point in the recent past.

110. The Curriculum for Excellence was a product of the Labour-led Scottish Executive and retains the potential to have a positive impact on educational achievement. Indeed, the CfE action plan for 2011/12 states its commitment to “raising standards and attainment levels through excellence in learning and teaching.” The curriculum takes a holistic approach to education which encourages pupils to identify and appreciate overarching themes uniting disparate subject areas. It also places great emphasis on literacy and numeracy, identifying these, along with health and wellbeing, as the responsibility of all teachers. Crucially, it promises to give teachers the flexibility to tailor their learning plans to suit the needs of their pupils. If schools and local authorities stay true to these principles and receive informed and practical guidance as to how they can be implemented, they could provide powerful levers for enhancing educational outcomes for children across the social spectrum.

C. Lessons from the past

111. In 2003, the Scottish Executive’s Key Findings from the National Evaluation of the New Community Schools Pilot Programme in Scotland cited the increased provision and support for vulnerable children and families as a major success of the New Community Schools project, highlighting improved pupils outcomes and increasing levels of community and family engagement. Unfortunately, and perhaps due to the overwhelming focus on implementing the Curriculum for Excellence, the New

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34 Scottish Government, Aug 2003
Community Schools Programme has been discontinued. However, New Community Schools may provide a model for the kind of community hubs that would offer both the positive intervention opportunities and connection between community and school that underpinned much of the evidence the Sounding Board received.

(i) Lessons from Glasgow

112. Glasgow faces a specific set of educational challenges, largely due to the high levels of poverty, deprivation and social fragmentation referred to in this paper’s third chapter. For example, on average, 30 per cent of pupils in the city receive free school meals, compared to a 15 per cent elsewhere. The local authority also accommodates a disproportionate number of looked after children.

113. In 2010, Glasgow City Council asserted an alternative set of priorities to those pursued by the Scottish Government, announcing plans to focus resources on increasing the number of nurture classes from 57 to 68, instead of reducing class sizes to 18 in P1-P3. Nurture groups, which have been described in glowing terms by Glasgow’s teachers, are small classes of 8 to 10 pupils who are experiencing emotional, behavioural and educational difficulties.

114. The pupils spend a substantial part of each week in the group but remain part of their mainstream class, which is overseen by two specially-trained staff members, a teacher and an assistant. The classes have a dual focus, promoting models of polite and supportive behaviour, whilst working to make pupils feel valued and accepted. Communication and interaction are central to this approach, with the class assembling in the morning to eat breakfast together. The efficacy of nurture classes can be measured in success: after less than three terms, 80 per cent of pupils are ready to return to mainstream class.

115. Glasgow City Council has evaluated the impact of nurture classes.\textsuperscript{35} Research published in to 2007 showed that pupils in nurture groups showed significant improvement in:

- Behaviour;

- Social and emotional well-being;

\textsuperscript{35} See the Nurture Group Network, \url{http://www.nurturegroups.org/}

45
• Academic attainment, especially in basic literacy skills.

In addition to this, other pupils benefit from the periodic removal from class, and eventual recuperation, of pupils whose behaviour may have a disruptive influence on concentration and learning.

116. The most recent statistics show that whilst Glasgow continues to underperform educationally compared to other local authority areas, overall standards are improving. In 2012/13, a record number of Glasgow school-leavers (31.4 per cent) went to university or college to study higher education. The proportion of unemployed school-leavers dropped into single figures for the first time, with the percentage unemployed (9.5 per cent), the lowest ever recorded in Glasgow.

117. These improvements can be directly related to a number of schemes aimed at improving pupil prospects. These include making a senior staff member at every single secondary school responsible for pupil destinations, a role that entails organising monthly case management meetings with school-leavers to ensure that they will achieve a positive destination commensurate with their skills and aptitudes. Pupils at risk of negative outcomes due to issues with attendance, performance and behaviour are referred to a central team that helps them to identify what subjects they enjoy, before identifying an activity programme tailored to their particular needs. This can include counselling, anger management, lessons on personal finance and personal development training. Pupils also receive additional support to help them obtain an apprenticeship or to move into further study.

(ii) Lessons from London

118. The London Challenge was launched in 2003 by the then Labour Education Secretary Estelle Morris. The “challenge” was to break the link between disadvantage and low achievement. This was to be achieved through a leadership training programme for existing teachers and new entrants to the professional, and support for teachers who wished to improve their teaching skills. This approach was underpinned by the use of extensive data detailing the performance of individual subject departments and of students from different social and ethnic backgrounds.
A 2010 evaluation undertaken by OFSTED\textsuperscript{36} noted the following significant achievements:

- The primary schools in London Challenge are improving faster than those in the rest of England.

- At their most recent inspection, 30\% of London’s local authority controlled secondary schools were judged to be outstanding, reflecting the positive impact of London Challenge. This compares with 17.5\% for the rest of England.

- Only 4 per cent of London’s secondary schools are currently judged by Ofsted to be inadequate, compared with 4.1 per cent in the rest of England, and 9 per cent of London’s academies.

The report cited four principal factors as central to this success:

- The clear and concise leadership provided by the team leaders and the sense of professional duty they instilled in teachers.

- The audit of need which established where the money was most required and ensured that it met the needs of individual schools.

- The introduction of “teaching schools” which extended coaching and practical activities to groups of teachers from schools within easy travelling distance.

- The development of robust systems to track pupils’ progress and provide effective intervention for pupils at risk of underachievement.

(iii) Lessons from Finland

International research suggests that the best performing education systems share a number of common features: extensive, expansive and in-depth training; levels of pay comparable to those in competing professional occupations; and time afforded to professional learning and development. Finland is a perennial high performer in international comparative pupil tests such as PISA and is generally recognised as an international leader in education. 93 per cent of Finns graduate from high school –

\textsuperscript{36} Ofsted, London Challenge, Dec 2010
66 per cent progressing on to higher education – and the disparity between high and low performing pupils is relatively modest.

121. Finland’s teachers receive between two and three years of graduate-level preparation before they enter the profession, typically involving at least one full year of training in a school linked to a university. They are selected from the top ten per cent of Finnish graduates (those who attain the required Masters qualification), and spend fewer hours in the classroom than Scottish teachers, using the additional time to work on the curriculum and track student progress (although not through standardised assessment). The schooling system is highly integrated: every school shares the same national goals and recruits from a common pool of – highly qualified – teachers, ensuring that every child, regardless of where they live, has access to a high quality education. Indeed, “equality”, in terms of access to quality, could be said to be the central tenet of the Finnish education system.

122. Another aspect of Finland’s schooling system is “research-based teacher education”. This involves training teachers to become “action researchers” with specific focus on identifying and supporting low achieving students. According to one study, this is based on 4 elements:

- A study programme predicated on the systematic analysis of education;
- All teaching based on research;
- Organizing activities to facilitate debate and decision-making through the investigation and solving of educational problems;
- The fostering of academic research skills.

Reported benefits to teachers of this approach include: greater confidence; an enhanced belief in their power to make a difference to pupils’ learning; a greater enthusiasm for collaborative working; a commitment to change practice and a greater willingness to innovate.

123. We do not advocate that we attempt to transplant en masse the Finnish schooling system, or even that we cherry pick aspects which seem particularly alluring. If an
education system is a reflection of the cultural traditions, norms and values of society, than to do so would be foolish. What we do recommend, however, is that we attempt to learn from the Finnish system, and use it to inform and enlighten our understanding of the way we teach and learn in Scotland.37

D. Targeted interventions

The Pupil Premium

124. The Pupil Premium (PP) was one of the Liberal Democrats’ headline manifesto pledges ahead of the 2010 General Election. The PP is additional funding that is allocated by government, via local authorities, to schools in addition to the main school budget. It is allocated to schools to work with pupils who have been registered for free school meals (FSMs) at any time in the past six years. Schools also receive funding for children who have been looked after continuously for six months or more as well as children of service personnel. Head teachers and school leaders are responsible for deciding how to use PP in their own schools. They are also held accountable for the decisions that they make on use of this funding. Accountability comes through different mechanisms, including performance tables that show performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds compared with their peers and Ofsted inspection reporting, which focus on attainment of pupil groups, in particular those that attract PP. Although schools can decide how to allocate funding within the school, the funding is intended to support specific pupils to narrow the achievement gap between them and their peers. Total PP funding was £625 million in 2011/12, £1.25 billion in 2012/13 and £1.87 billion in 2013/14. This equates to £623 per eligible pupil in 2012/13, rising to £900 per eligible pupil in 2013/14.

125. The Department of Education published an evaluation of the Pupil Premium in July 2013. It looked at the allocation of PP funding in 2011/12 and asked a number of questions about how the funding was spent, differences in approach to use of PP by schools, perceived impact of the PP to date and plans for use of PP in future years. The publication notes that “it is too early to measure the impacts of the Pupil Premium on attainment”. As such, the evaluation only looked at schools’ perceptions of the PP and how it influenced the support provided to pupils. Almost all schools

were monitoring the impact of the support they were providing for the pupils targeted. In particular, schools were looking for improvements in attainment, attendance, confidence and behaviour as well as reductions in exclusions and in pupils leaving school for positive destinations. But no monitoring information on progress achieved through PP was reported in this early evaluation report.

**Helping parents with the hidden costs of a state education**

126. The Scottish Government recently followed the example of the UK Government by announcing that free school meals will be available to all P1-P3 pupils in Scotland. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation\(^\text{38}\) suggests that providing all pupils with one free school meal can have a positive impact on health, behaviour and educational achievement. That said, the quality of the food on offer, its provenance and nutritional value, is vitally important. Whilst we broadly welcome the introduction of free school meals, we would caution that they cannot be delivered on the cheap.

127. School meals are just one of what could be termed the “hidden costs” of school education. Although every child in Scotland is entitled to free schooling, this does not mean that sending a child to school is free. Research indicates that, between the ages of 4 and 18, the annual costs of school education can exceed £1,600 per child. This sum includes out of school care, such as breakfast clubs and homework clubs (£558); transport to and from school (£369); food during the school day (£379); and school uniforms and shoes (£186).

128. Parents are also expected to pay extra for school trips or foreign exchanges. However, not all parents are willing or able to bear this additional burden. According to the Aviva Family Finance Report\(^\text{39}\), 69 per cent of parents are willing to pay for field trips within the UK, 54 per cent are willing to pay for foreign field trips and 33 per cent are willing to pay for foreign language exchanges. These figures fall to 63 per cent, 49 per cent and 30 per cent respectively for one-parent families. This suggests that a sizeable proportion of pupils may be excluded from participating in school trips or foreign exchanges on the grounds of cost. School trips can include

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\(^{38}\) Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Tackling low educational achievement, 2007

\(^{39}\) Aviva, Family Finance Report, July 2013
visits to museums, galleries, and other major cultural and historical attractions. As such, they can be of significant benefit to a pupil’s educational and social development.

129. There are no national guidelines regarding eligibility or entitlement to financial aid for parents struggling to cope with the other hidden costs of state education, with the provision of advice and support devolved to local education authorities. This means that deprived pupils in some local authority areas may be denied opportunities available to those living elsewhere in the country.

E. A vision for raising educational achievement in Scotland

130. In this paper, we have provided an overview of the current landscape of educational achievement in Scotland and highlighted the critical nature of cognitive development, literacy, numeracy and exam performance to a child’s future prospects in life. In doing so, we have exposed the yawning chasm that separates vulnerable and deprived children from the rest, and the ramifications this has on their chances of achieving a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.

131. Educational inequality is intergenerational and deeply entrenched. We believe that in order to tackle it effectively, we must devise a clear and coherent vision that provides for children from the pre-natal stage until they leave school, and in some cases beyond.

Solidarity and hope

132. The first stage of this strategy is predicated on infusing communities, and the families of which they are comprised, with a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. Educating our children should not be confined to parents and educators; it should be a joint enterprise in which we all have a stake.

133. We must recognise the difficulties that parents face and do our best to help them. Constructive relationships between families, parents and professionals will only build in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. Evidence shows that where parents feel intimidated or undervalued they are less likely to engage, especially if they themselves have had negative experiences of education and childcare services. Helping families in difficulty must be based on compassion, not coercion. From birth
onwards, parents should have the opportunity to mix with other parents and child professionals in an environment that allows them to share their concerns and benefit from the knowledge and experience of others. The evidence of Sure Start has amply illustrated the efficacy of early intervention. We know what works; it is time to implement it.

**Embedding achievement across the system**

134. A commitment to raising achievement and closing the achievement gap should be enshrined in the plans and outcomes of local authorities, schools, government agencies and central Government. Specifically, local authorities should be required to report on the actions they are taking to raise achievement levels; work undertaken to identify and support underperforming pupils should be part of the school inspection process; and the Scottish Government should develop a national long-term strategy on raising achievement amongst vulnerable and deprived children. Where necessary, and whether in the form of additional finance or teaching resources, targeted intervention should be used as a tool to help schools or local authorities struggling to meet agreed outcomes.

135. We need to make better use of our learning experience and be more prepared to take risks and try new things. The Board has encountered many projects and pilots that were abandoned after a short period of time, shorn of funding, regardless of results. Programmes designed to improve children’s educational outcomes, from local pilots to national strategies, must be rigorously monitored, evaluated and assessed on the basis of efficacy. If the evidence demonstrates that they work, they should be funded, adopted, and expanded.

**Fostering excellence in the teaching profession: from competent teachers to expert practitioners**

136. The McCrone Agreement attempted to cultivate excellence in the sector by boosting the morale and status of teachers, strengthening Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and introducing Chartered and Advanced Teacher Status. Whilst the latter innovation was neither perfect in conception or design, it had potential, nor the decision to abandon it was premature. Commitment and excellence should be rewarded; teachers should be recruited from amongst the top graduates with the
top qualifications (preferably those educated to Masters level), and granted the recognition and respect that behaves a profession integral to the betterment of society.

137. We must recognise the importance to teachers of a sound grounding in theory and research. Teaching is a dynamic profession. Teachers should begin reading and writing research during their initial teacher training, and continue to engage with it throughout their career. Scotland has already advanced down this road, most recently with the publication of the Donaldson Review of teacher education, which recommended that teacher education should be viewed as a career long endeavour, necessitating closer alignment across and greater collaboration amongst schools, authorities, universities and national organisations. (Donaldson, 2011) We must work to ensure that these sound principles are actually ensconced in practice.

138. Finally, we must ensure that financial and logistical barriers to continuing professional development are removed. Teachers are educators, not administrators. It is the responsibility of central and local government to ensure that they have the necessary tools and resources, the materials and support staff, to fulfil this function. Time outside the classroom should be devoted to tracking pupil progress, planning lessons, and professional development, not negotiating bureaucratic obstacles.

**Promoting participation and inclusion**

139. Schools have a duty to promote participation and inclusion. However, the current system of charging for extra-curricular activities erects unnecessary barriers and artificial divides between pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds. We believe that all pupils in Scotland should be able to participate in extra-curricular activities, regardless of their parents’ financial circumstances, and we would welcome the publication of national guidelines stipulating what help local authorities should offer.

140. The demands of childcare do not end when a child begins school. In recognition of this, we believe that some provision should be made for out of school care for school age children in Scotland. At the last UK Labour conference, Yvette Cooper announced that, if elected in 2015, Labour will offer free childcare between the hours of 8am and 6pm to parents of all primary school children. This is a positive
innovation that will allow children from every backgrounds free access to pre-school breakfast clubs and post-school homework clubs. As well as providing parents with the opportunity to work without having to worry about the costs of childcare, the introduction of a similar measure in Scotland would foster greater participation and inclusion in the life of the school, help to ensure that educational resources are maximised, and guarantee all pupils a healthy start and constructive end to the school day.

**Information and evaluation: the need to share resources**

141. Throughout the course of this paper, we have discovered the vast wealth of research and expertise at the fingertips of those who wish to diagnose, identify and eradicate educational inequality. This information should be compiled and installed into a national performance database, with free access to parents, teachers, local authorities and educational professionals. The benefits of fostering the development and sharing of expertise have been amply demonstrated in Finland and elsewhere.

**Adaptation not appropriation**

142. We must learn from the past and we must learn from what works. However, we should be cautious about adopting en masse policies or innovations that have worked on a minor scale, or those that have been successful in different countries with different cultures. For example, we will not achieve a “Nordic” early education and childcare system merely by expanding the availability of free provision; rather, we must recognise that the Norwegian system, for example, was predicated on supply – the creation of a high quality childcare workforce. Quality is just as important, if not more so, than quantity. Equally, the London Challenge was tailored to London circumstances; importing it wholesale will not work. The key to success is learning, not copying.

**A culture of success**

143. In this paper we have articulated our belief that education is not just about exams and qualifications. It is about turning our children into kind, tolerant and responsible citizens. However, the national obsession with attainment remains, to the detriment of these other, equally valuable, attributes. The “hothouse” system of education employed by some countries may be successful in academic terms, but it is not
necessarily conducive to human happiness. Equally, a working culture that demands people to work long and flexible hours for little return, embraces zero hours contracts and shows little or no tolerance for familial factors, renders establishing effective, high quality and affordable childcare fraught with difficulty. Wraparound care is much easier to achieve if everyone works 9pm to 5pm, and high quality care becomes much more affordable if everyone is paid a decent wage. The success of any policy, from childcare onwards, depends on our wider economic expectations and practices, and the patterns and principles that define our social landscape. So in deciding how good and how equal we wish our education system to be, we must first ask “what kind of society do we want to be?”

F. Conclusion

144. This is not a quick fix. The foundations of Finland’s highly successful education system were laid in the post war period. It was not until the end of the 20th Century and the introduction of PISA testing that the efficacy of the Finnish system was demonstrated. Years of entrenched inequality cannot be easily addressed, and the gap between high and low performing pupils will not be closed by a single policy or in a single year. It will take a multilateral approach, and many years of hard, collaborative work.

145. However, there are reasons to be positive. The most recent PISA results show an improvement in Scotland’s educational performance and a narrowing of educational inequality. Most importantly, we already know what we need to do to succeed. Promoting social inclusion in families and communities; providing high quality childcare to children across Scotland, starting with the most vulnerable; working to enhance teacher quality; learning from the examples of other countries, and from successful innovations in our own country. Scotland once had a reputation for educational excellence and social solidarity. It is time to regain it.