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EDUCATION: A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT

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The NUT believes that education is a fundamental human right. Globally, education can play a central role in the elimination of poverty. Lifelong education is vital to both society and national economies.

All young people must not only have equality of access to high quality education, but they must be able to learn new skills and disciplines throughout their adult lives.

Globally, many economies are developing exponentially. Evidence from OECD that all its countries have seen a rise in the education levels of their citizens over the past decade demonstrates the common commitment of citizens and, in particular, teachers, to the vital role of education in promoting good societies.

Education is vital to the future of societies. Renewed talks on the General Agreement on Trading Services should continue to exclude education from the global market, therefore. The uncertainties and vagaries of the market would be profoundly destabilising to each country's future. A market approach to education also ignores the incalculable added value and commitment that public service workers bring to publicly provided services; particularly education.

The NUT believes fundamentally that achieving the highest possible equity of outcome for educational achievement for all young people is an essential underpinning for a successful society, both socially and economically.

What, then, are the principles for securing a high quality, equitable, country-wide education system?

- Community cohesion must be a cross-party objective.
- The average percentage of the gross domestic product spent by OECD countries on education should be a global average as a first step. The massive inequities in spending on education between developing and industrialised countries must be narrowed. This should be a United Nations target.
- Education must be a public service, publicly provided. Private sponsorship and industry have a relationship with education, but as supportive partners, not as providers.
- Diversity of school type as a country policy is a dead end. Differentiation of provision to meet individual needs within schools must be the priority, not differentiation between types of schools.
- Countries must have as a top priority the provision of continuing professional development for all their teachers. The key principle is that professional development should be an entitlement, not an imposition.
- High stakes accountability, including national targets, test results and school performance tables, damage teaching, learning and the morale of school communities. Accountability systems based on institutional self-evaluation, with the principle of providing support where weaknesses are identified, must be the top priority.
- There are arguments for a framework National Curriculum in each country. Such a curriculum should be a scaffolding for encouraging schools' creativity, not a benchmark for encouraging market competition between schools.
- The curriculum should remain balanced and broadly based for 14-19 year olds. The examination system for secondary pupils should not narrow options for young people when they leave statutory education.
- All countries should have properly funded equalities policies, which focus on groups of pupils and communities in need of intensive support.
- There should be a democratic relationship between schools and communities, such that communities have a key role in contributing to the governance of schools.
- OECD country education systems should seek teacher exchange relationships with developing countries. Links between the Commonwealth and the OECD, for example, are examples of the new networks which can be established between regional networks of countries and global networks.

- The key objective of every country-wide system must be a good local school for every and a good local school for every community. Schools have the potential to be at centre of their communities, triggering not only educational, but social and economic regeneration and contributing to community cohesion.

Governments should remember that the teaching profession needs nurturing and supporting. In particular, governments need to enter into dialogue seriously with the teacher organisations. Teachers, whether they are students or leaders with long experience, are very clear about what constitutes successful pedagogy and their professional development needs.

The teaching community is highly skilled. Each government must establish a strategy for the profession and its development which teachers feel they can own.

Finally, an objective for all governments must be the de-politicisation of the education debate. There are strong arguments for each government establishing National Forums for distilling best practice. Such forums should involve all stakeholders, including teacher, parent and local authority organisations, government and industry.

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