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## Market Madness: condition critical

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**ABSTRACT** For over a quarter of a century there has been a creeping marketization of the English education system. No part of the system remains unscathed. In this article the consequences of marketization are set out clearly and alternative models of the future are presented. The author calls for another ‘Great Debate’ – but one that mobilises community enthusiasm for the aims of education and which seeks to refashion an education system based on a clear commitment to the public good. The condition of English education is critical. It has been weakened by pathological marketization and is in desperate need of treatment to restore it to health. In this article, the author tries to diagnose the disease, describes some of its symptoms and effects on various parts of the system and finally offers two possible prognoses for the patient; a turn for the worse and the start of a recovery.

### **Key Processes of Marketisation**

#### *Commodification*

If education is seen as a commodity, something which can be consumed and traded, then schools, colleges, universities and the courses they offer all enter the market. What were previously thought of as lifelong social interactions and developmental processes become tradable things with tangible exchange value. Thinking this way inevitably changes the relationship between students, teachers and institutions. Students become consumers, demanding that education ‘delivers’ outcomes for them, and they also themselves become commodities, to be selected by providers based on their likelihood of success. Teachers become the agents of ‘delivery’ and the institutions they work in ‘perform’ better or worse on a numerical scale.

#### *Valuing and Ranking*

To be tradable, every aspect of learning needs to be quantified and given a value. Grades, points, qualifications, measures of progress and added value all reduce

the complex processes of education to numbers. This promotes a hierarchy of worth, with 'outstanding' schools, 'top' universities and 'facilitating' subjects at the peaks of finely graduated hierarchies. In such rankings, human beings themselves become 'grade 1 teachers' or 'top decile' students at one end or 'marginal performers' and 'failures' at the other. This inevitably changes people's perceptions of their own worth and that of others.

### *Choice*

In order to survive in a market where everything has a value, we are driven to seek out the best which is available. As consumers we sense that there is always something better to aspire to. The market needs its 'second-rate' or 'sink' options in order to scare us into scrambling to escape them and get ahead of those who have no choice. We worship choice and we assume that making the right choice will help us get on. We seek to benefit from the inequality, or 'diversity', of what is on offer by grasping something distinctive and valuable which not everyone can have. However, the market actually limits our options and only allows us to strive for certain things. It leaves inequalities unchallenged and in fact tends to widen them.

### *Competition*

Whether it's the global economic 'race to the top' which can never be won, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores which governments use to bash their own education systems or national league tables of various kinds, we all seem to be running up an accelerating down escalator and never quite reaching our destination. At the individual level this promotes a general sense of dissatisfaction and increasing pressure on us to make better choices and achieve higher grades. If the only outcomes that are worth something are a clutch of high-grade GCSEs at 16, at least AAB grades in two or three facilitating A levels at 18 and a place in a Russell Group university then most students will inevitably be 'losers'.

## **How Do These Processes Play out in Our Current Context?**

### *Choice and Diversity*

'Choice and diversity' was the last government's euphemism for marketisation in public services, putting a positive spin on something which was not particularly popular with public service users. In education, it meant promoting new providers and encouraging competition between them. This was sometimes also described as 'contestability'.

Looking back to those pre-2010 days, this version of marketisation seems pretty tame, but it paved the way for the current government's market strategy for education. The idea is that good schools will attract more students and less good schools will be motivated to improve by the competition for students from

the good schools. The less popular schools might get some support to improve or be rebranded and relaunched with new leadership. The possibility of decline, failure or closure sharpens everyone's focus on doing better.

And we all like choice don't we? When we're shopping we like to be able to choose between different products, check prices and value for money and make our own judgement about what's best for us. Choice is a good thing, yes? Well, up to a point. Do we really want to shop around and choose between different educational offers for ourselves or our children? Can education be both a public service and a commodity? Isn't it too important to be placed in the hands of competing providers based on what they are prepared to offer within the local market? We're paying for it anyway so surely we want the best possible public education for ourselves as well as for others as a civic right.

As with our other public services, we want education to respond to our needs and aspirations and ultimately to be accountable to us – all of us. Any choice and diversity in what is available – specialist programmes or facilities, experimental or innovative approaches – should be available to all within a system of public education and not be the result of luck – for example, 'I can develop my musical skills because I happen to attend an excellent specialist music school'.

When the market is combined with the lack of any coherent institutional framework, the absence of local whole-system leadership or planning, the result is actually a loss of choice and a lack of diversity. In post-16 education, for example, providers or systems need to be of a certain size to offer the full range of courses to students, including minority subjects like A-level German or Classical Civilisation. Encouraging new, smaller, competing providers can give the impression of more choice – of provider – but lead to less choice – of course. Where there are many competing sixth forms there may be enough demand overall but no single provider can run a viable A-level German or Classical Civilisation group, thereby restricting choice for everyone.

So we should be very cautious about the panacea of more choice and diversity in education as we could find ourselves losing more than we gain.

### *The Providers*

Schools or colleges will often claim to be 'heavily oversubscribed' to establish how popular, and by implication, how successful they are. These claims should be taken with a heavy pinch of salt.

Being able to measure demand is very important in a market system. Many providers want to show that what they offer has some scarcity value; that more people want it than can actually get it. Saying 'we are oversubscribed' is a neat, shorthand way of letting consumers know the scarcity value of the commodity you're offering. But choosing a school or college is generally a single-outcome decision; each consumer will only choose one at a time. Both the school application system and the post-16 free-for-all allow for multiple applications. Consumers make several applications but will ultimately choose only one. So a

high number of applications is a very inadequate measure of demand. Only the final number of students actually enrolling is a true indication of choices made. Schools and colleges have target numbers and each either does or does not achieve this.

A comprehensive college can easily have more applicants than places and therefore be described as 'oversubscribed'. This is not because they are selective but because they understand that many applicants make multiple applications. In a competitive environment with new post-16 providers opening up every year, this will intensify, so what matters is the proportion of applicants who actually enrol; the conversion rate.

Selective post-16 providers have no problem turning people away as they think it contributes to an impression of success. Comprehensive post-16 providers operating in a market have to understand the dynamic of that market if they want to plan to be full without wishing to turn students away. That's quite a challenge!

### *The Consumers*

An ideal market requires well-informed consumers who are in a position to make choices between products based on accurate information about the things that matter to them; for example, quality and price. If public services like education are really to operate in a market, consumers, whether parents or students, need to be well informed about the alternatives available before they exercise their choice. It is, after all, a very important choice with longer-term consequences than most consumer purchases. This means having access to good information, advice and guidance from disinterested and well-informed experts. It means trusting and understanding the data in league tables, their value and limitations. It also means being able to evaluate a wide range of other 'objective' published data and statistical claims.

In reality, the market in education, as in other areas, is far from perfect and it tends to reinforce the prior advantages of some consumers. Providers with good reputations will tend to attract the kinds of students who are most likely to further enhance their attractiveness in an upward spiral of positive feedback. Other providers can easily fall into a downward spiral.

In post-16 education, it is widely known that many secondary schools with sixth forms work hard to ensure that their most promising students 'stay on' at 16 and as a result such schools fall short of the ideal of providing independent advice and guidance about the full range of options open to their students. They often cannot resist describing these options in their own words rather than allowing alternative providers to do so themselves. These tendencies are a natural product of the market system and all its various incentives and pressures. On top of this, markets lead to marketing. Glossy brochures, prospectuses, press releases and advertising campaigns boosted via social media are now key elements of many providers' strategy. They aim to boost

recruitment and manage reputation and are seen as essential for survival. Besides, if everyone else around us is doing it, how can we avoid doing it?

Those of us who work in education enjoy celebrating educational achievement, so we like to see the benefits of learning promoted in the public sphere and we can applaud the best and most imaginative campaigns of colleges and universities. While being delighted by the giant images of our successful former students smiling at us from so many buses in our area, we do wonder, at a time of spending cuts, whether our marketing expenditure could have been better applied to a more educational purpose.

I am always impressed by the way that the French election authorities give equal national billboard space to each presidential candidate, however small their party or poorly funded their campaign; the argument is that the state should underwrite some parity of exposure if citizens are to have a real choice in the democratic 'marketplace'. If we want to promote education, perhaps a similar level playing field might be possible for educational marketing here?

At the moment it seems that in the Hobbesian 'war of all against all' where every educational provider is clamouring for attention and favour in the marketplace there is no way of stopping us all from spending public money on campaigns which portray us in the best light and which tell our best story. Let's just hope that we all have enough integrity to ensure that the stories we tell are reasonably accurate and that our consumers aren't too disappointed when they have a chance to test the reality against the rhetoric.

### *The Commodities*

All economies need a currency which we can use to represent the value we give to things and which can be exchanged for real things. A currency allows us to convert labour into goods or capital and back again. In our credentialised education economy, qualifications are effectively the currency. They represent an investment of effort and commitment to acquire knowledge and skill to a certain level and they can be traded in the labour market for access to further educational and job opportunities. More currency equals a greater chance of success and, understandably, everyone wants more of that. Individuals are judged by the qualifications they have obtained and there is a strong correlation between the highest level of qualification achieved and lifetime earnings.

Education providers are also judged by the volume and type of qualifications their students obtain. For example, A-level grades can be converted to points, making it easy to quantify the value of qualifications from A\* to E. There is also considerable differentiation, with facilitating A levels at the high-value end of the market and vocational qualifications in the bargain basement. In fact, despite having a Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) tariff, these qualifications are not even valued in the same currency in some markets, such as the performance tables where vocational point scores are presented separately from A-level point scores.

So, as well as students themselves being judged by qualification measures, schools and colleges can be ranked by the volume and value of the qualifications they provide to their students. And as riches beget riches, the tendency is for those that have the most to attract more. This is true at the student level where those most likely to do well at one level are those who have already demonstrated the ability to do well at the level below. It is also true at the institutional level where attracting already successful students is the best guarantee of greater success.

As with the profit motive in the financial economy, there is a real danger that the rush to accumulate currency takes precedence over the real productive and sustainable value of economic activity. Labour simply becomes a means of earning money and capital a means of accumulating more wealth, with little thought given to human values and social purpose. Equally, with qualifications, we risk seeing the qualification as the goal rather than valuing the learning which it symbolises. Also, the value of a qualification, like that of any currency, is affected by its supply or scarcity. The more common it is, the less value it has, leading to a recalibration of the currency's value – devaluing it and sending people scurrying to look for a better, scarcer and therefore more valuable qualification.

Where being qualified and therefore 'educated' is a positional good, we live with the paradox that the more skilled and qualified we all become, the lower the value of our qualifications – in effect we have to run faster to stand still. One solution is to ration the supply of high grades to a fixed amount or to recalibrate upwards by constantly making qualifications 'harder'. This preserves the inequalities inherent in the system and does nothing to recognise the real educational progress being made. Such economic solutions devalue our educational objectives.

Is it possible to imagine a different system? One where learning and demonstrating skill are valued without requiring constant measurement and comparison? Could we find ways to lift those learners who have least access to the all-important currency and help them achieve an agreed national threshold? Could we learn to celebrate learning and achievement without the need to endlessly rank and classify learners? Could we decouple education from the market?

### *Learners as Commodities*

The rhetoric of market choice paints the student as a well-informed, discerning consumer, choosing between different providers. However, in our hyper-competitive market the student is often the commodity, with the providers acting as consumers vying to pick the 'best' students. In the 16-19 market, for instance, the 'premium' student has already demonstrated high achievement – the clearest sign that they will help the institution do well. The 'remaindered' student is worth much less; they've had a false start, failed to show enough promise and will probably generate a lot of work for little return. Nearly as

risky is the 'discount' student who turns 18 during their course or may even already be 'spoiled goods' past their sell-by date, attracting 17.5% less funding for following the same programme as their 16 and 17 year-old classmates (a penalty I describe as 'aspiration tax').

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the raising of the participation age has not delivered on its promise of appropriate provision for all 16-18-year-olds. In effect, the market means that the most sought-after students are often over-provided for while the others take their chances.

This is a crazy way to do things. Post-16 providers are encouraged to think as competitive agents who fight to attract students while also being prepared to spit some of them out on the way with little regard for what happens to them next. What we need is an inclusive tertiary education system which takes responsibility for providing for every young person aged 16-18 in a locality. This requires some local planning with an expectation that institutions collaborate and see themselves as parts of a single system acting in the interests of all young people.

### *The System*

Whenever I am asked to explain English secondary education to foreign visitors I usually start by saying that there is no English 'system'. I then try to describe the rather random pattern of overlapping provision which cannot be dignified by the term 'system'. Different areas have different permutations of 11-16 schools, 11-18 schools, sixth form and further education colleges with overlapping catchments, degrees of selection and market behaviours and a frightening lack of coherence or planning. The whole is so clearly less than the sum of the parts that I am not surprised when my visitors look at me with pity.

In his excellent post 'Teacher Quality and Education Structures' [1], David Pavett tells the story of visitors to the room-sized early computers who were given wire cutters and encouraged to snip wires at random to show that the system could cope with such broken connections thanks to its built-in redundancy. David uses this example to show how system redundancy can compensate for parts failure and to argue that it is quite wrong to assume that the performance of a system cannot be greater than that of its component parts or that a school or education system cannot be better than its teachers. In fact the very opposite is the case. A strong system with plenty of opportunities for partnership, sharing and support can be greater than the sum of its parts because it has lots of redundant 'wiring' which shores up performance when necessary. So inter-institutional 'wiring' can help to improve schools.

David goes on to contrast a market system with a more 'connection-rich system'. The former has hardly any inter-institutional 'wiring' as each school has to behave as a competitor and avoid sharing anything. In the latter, schools see each other as partners and can support each other by sharing a lot. For example, if a group of schools in an area routinely share their expertise, this can come into its own when one school suddenly faces a dip in performance, staff

shortages or long-term absence. Staff can be part-seconded to help out and colleagues will already know how to offer, or ask for, help. If departments in several schools share resources and teaching methods and build up a store of good practice and strong support networks, this will be a great help with changes to curriculum or assessment methods or shifts in student numbers. Also, relating jointly to external partners such as universities, employers or cultural organisations can lead to a stronger, richer and more cost-effective input from those organisations.

A strong system also promotes system leadership as opposed to purely institutional leadership. Groups of schools can think of their students as part of a wider community of learners and the development of strong, distinctive or specialist offers driven by demand can be made available to all rather than being exclusive to one school as part of a search for competitive advantage. However, all of this requires a culture of openness and trust between schools and an investment in the 'wiring' and the process of partnership. Schools need to accept some loss of autonomy while the benefits for everyone clearly outweigh the disadvantages. But clearly in the short term, collaboration requires more effort than isolationism.

So, a good education system needs more 'wiring' but this does not mean more costly bureaucracy or layers of coordination. New technologies can facilitate communication and resource sharing between the practitioners, who know best what they need without needing much top-down control. The market won't help the system function better. It rips out much of the 'wiring' and forces different sections to function without any support from others. This makes them more likely to break down, sometimes beyond repair.

For the time being we are stuck with the logic of competition and incoherent markets in education. Should we simply settle for being prisoners of this logic or could we start to subvert it by putting in our own wiring piece by piece? Slow and painstaking though it may be, it might be the only way to start creating the real education system we need bit by bit from the parts to a better whole.

### **Are Markets Really so Bad?**

Is the effect of the market really so bad? Surely, striving, dissatisfaction and a hunger for more are great motivators of learning. Are these not classic consumer behaviours? Dissatisfaction and striving are certainly prerequisites for learning but they need to be combined with curiosity, a desire to understand and a sense of human fellowship if they are to foster a genuine hunger for learning. To be real learners, we need to be inquisitive rather than acquisitive.

Each aspect of marketisation changes the way we see ourselves and the way we relate to others. The danger of assimilating a market view of education is that in our rush to accumulate its goods and get ahead we lose sight of the fact that learning is a social and developmental process involving human relationships and requiring human solidarity. Certainly, we learn in order to



advance ourselves but we are learning from others in the hope of achieving something with others. We will never see other people as our equals or our partners in progress if we believe that their educational advancement is at the expense of ours. Our educational relationships with others should not be economic transactions but human ones; threads in a social fabric, which is our only hope of a better world.

### **Education 2020**

In this section, I imagine two very different possible futures for education in England following the 2015 election and five years of change.

#### *Future A. Life in the Education Market*

Following the 2015 election, the political majority at Westminster remained committed to our current direction of travel. Continuing public austerity meant less public spending on education while the rhetoric was even more strident about 'UK plc' needing to become ever more globally competitive and 'win the race to the top' both economically and educationally in the PISA tables. Politicians' response to Britain's continued economic decline was to become even more uncompromising about demanding personal responsibility for high standards and 'no excuses' from individual students, teachers, schools and colleges if they achieve anything less than average in various national measures.

We now talk routinely of the 'education market', just like the 'energy market'. As with other utilities, the landscape is dominated by a small number of competing national chains, now known as companies, with national contracts. These are the 'big six', each of which operates across all regions and in primary, secondary and post-16. Each company has a strong brand identity and has the capacity to innovate at company level; it supports its own teacher training and development and its own research capacity. Many of them also produce teaching and assessment materials commercially and offer a range of paid-for services to students and parents. They have massive budgets and are not subject to any local scrutiny or accountability and most are quoted on the stock exchange. They maintain close relationships with the national commissioners and politicians who sign off their contracts, regulate their activities and decide the performance measures they will be judged by. They are generally regarded as 'too big to fail'.

The various national companies offer a range of unique selling points and distinctive strengths to their customers. Some of the chains are a little more focused on inclusion and some on elitism, some emphasise sports or the arts a bit more while others have a slightly more technological bias. These 'flavours' are often linked to particular commercial partnerships.

In order to stimulate competition, the government has allowed the trend towards greater selection and stratification of schools to permit companies to offer 'different types of school for different types of learner'. So although each

company aims to cater for all types of learner, their size allows them to engage in 'cherry picking' and segregation of students with particular aptitudes and talents at a younger and younger age. Specialist technical schools are common, as are highly selective 'super-grammars'. One company's initiative to create a hyper-selective national residential sixth form college aiming to get every one of its students into Oxbridge soon led to the other companies following suit and selection for some of these colleges now starts at age 14.

All the companies market themselves vigorously and their slick television commercials tell inspiring personal stories of student growth, fulfilment and success within the company system. At the local level, schools are described in terms of their parent company rather than their school name and the company is the brand that really counts. Students generally study within a single company throughout their schooling, benefiting from continuity of staffing and ethos, and this is seen as a strength. People even claim to be able to identify which company a student was schooled in based on their behaviour and attitudes.

The school curriculum is increasingly driven by the perceived needs of the economy, concentrating on the 'core' subjects or vocational tracks which, it is claimed, will help students find their place in the workforce and beat the global competition. As public funding has continued to fall, companies are charging for more and more of the 'extras', including company-franchised mentoring and tutoring, sports, music, arts and outward-bound activities.

University fees have been uncapped and there is real competition on price, and companies have negotiated bulk deals with university groups offering preferential loans and bursaries to high-achieving students. Adult education is purely about investing in one's marketable skills and people have to borrow to pay a private provider for it, or persuade an employer to pay.

The national companies' dominance of the market has led to some spectacular scandals and market failures, the solution to which is always seen as better regulation or changes in company management. Public campaigning is mainly focused on local difficulties rather than offering any coherent critique of the system, and when it is proposed, system reform is seen as unrealistic. Education debates or industrial disputes tend to be about the ineffectiveness or monopolistic excesses of a national company and the barriers to new entrants.

Many parents and students are satisfied customers of the company they have chosen; they buy into its ethos and feel loyalty to it. This education market is diverse and seems to offer something for everyone, although the 'top' companies seem to find ways to move low-performing students out of their provision. Nationally, the achievement gap is widening but somehow this is glossed over as the spectacular results of the highest performing students are highlighted.

Popular television shows about education include a revival of 'Top of the Form', called 'Top Class', where students from different companies compete against each other in a general knowledge quiz, and 'Get Me Out of Here', a secretly filmed and selectively edited exposé of life in some of the 'toughest'

schools, which prides itself on ending the career of at least one teacher per episode.

As the 2020 election campaign gets going, one of the major parties is advocating a single guaranteed ‘national lifelong learning fund’ which the state will pay into and make available directly to the national companies to fund their students’ education from 14 onwards and to be repaid by individuals to their company once they start earning. The politics of education is essentially consumer politics and we hear very little advocacy of a democratically accountable public education, let alone the neighbourhood comprehensive school.

### *Future B. Creating a National Education Service*

Following the 2015 election, the new political majority at Westminster did not have a particularly coherent vision of what they wanted to do about education but they did agree that the solutions would probably not come from either politicians or the unfettered market. During the campaign, they had been struck by the level of popular dissatisfaction with the incoherence and chaos people were experiencing and impressed by the desire for change. Continuing with the reforms of the previous five years was clearly not an option.

In the absence of a strong ideological agenda, the politicians asked themselves whether the answers might perhaps be found in the imagination and daily practice of the people actually concerned with education. So within a few weeks of the election they launched a national Great Debate about the purpose and organisation of education in England. This willingness to listen to people turned out to be their most radical decision.

The Great Debate aimed to involve everyone in considering a few simple questions:

- What do we want from education?
- What is an educated person?
- How do we ensure that everyone gets the best possible education?

The initial Great Debate was given a month in order to focus everyone’s minds and instil a sense of urgency. It was conducted online, using social media, in public meetings large and small, inside and outside school classrooms and in outreach activity to ensure that everyone, including children and young people, had the opportunity to express their views. Public involvement in the process was very high, different opinions were respected and the views of ‘experts’ and education professionals were given equal weight to those of everyone else.

As the Great Debate got going, people got excited. They were being listened to and they were setting the agenda. Having voted to hand power to politicians, they were now being asked how that power should be used. The discussions generated many brilliant ideas and the deliberation and aggregation process throughout the month meant that the most popular themes started to emerge and people could return to the debate at different stages.

It became clear quite early on that there was a real consensus that England needs a common national education system with both social and personal objectives to meet the needs of all its people. One of the most popular emerging themes was 'education needs to be like the NHS' and that was actually one of the key outcomes: a groundswell of support for a comprehensive national education system based on agreed common aims, cooperation and universalism rather than competition and selection.

Even before any policies were implemented, the sheer breadth and depth of the national debate gave people the confidence that change is possible and promoted a degree of optimism about the future. Another outcome was a real celebration of the work of teachers and pride in the work of students. Many participants said that learning directly about what happens in our schools and universities had surprised and impressed them and inspired them to get more involved themselves.

Following this Great Debate, the legal status of all publicly funded schools was quickly harmonised so that they all operated on the same basis. The school curriculum was redefined in terms of human flourishing as well as the fundamental knowledge and skills that everyone needs to build on to be a successful contributor to society. There was support for both breadth and specialisation at upper secondary level, with no options being closed off at any age.

Once the national aims were agreed, the new system needed to be built from the existing one with collaboration around nationally agreed shared aims, core entitlements and funding as givens. The English regions were given the right to elect education councils to oversee the development of the system in their region using all the educational resources available. These elections gave the new councils a strong mandate to develop a distinctive approach for their area within the national aims. The limited funding available was boosted by a 'partnership premium', money previously tied up in competition and duplication. There was room for specialisation as well as regional and local innovation and some regions are now leading on different themes and sharing this work nationally and they have created new forums for action research, evaluation, curriculum and professional development.

The talents and skills of the nation's young people were increasingly recognised and celebrated, including their contribution to community and cultural life and the impact of their research. These are all valued within the school leavers' National Baccalaureate.

We are starting to see a renaissance of adult education in various forms as universities work with other parts of the education service to reach out more and respond to the needs and interests of all adults in their region. Reading groups, current affairs groups, cultural activity, community organising and volunteering all feed in to university extramural programmes, with a consequential strengthening of both geographical and virtual solidarity.

In fact, the Great Debate which started in the summer of 2015 has never really stopped. People found that they wanted to contribute to education and to

help shape the new system. The momentum of 2015 was built on through local education forums across the country which informed the work of the new education councils and helped hold them to account between elections. People's attachment to their education service and the idea of public service generally was strengthened by this activity.

Popular television shows include 'Amazing Youth', presented by young people, featuring a range of research and community projects they have conceived and led, and 'Speak Up' where young people from all over the country get to express their views and make their case for social change which can then be voted on by the audience.

By 2020 educational inequality has not been abolished but there is some evidence that the gaps are narrowing. Not everyone is satisfied with the rate of progress and funding remains tight. However, people are proud of the 'new' system, positive about its contribution to society and optimistic about its future. There does seem to be a consensus around the aims and values established through the Great Debate. By the time of the 2020 election, all the major parties are committed to the new system and the policy differences are mostly about resource allocation and curriculum priorities. One of the parties is advocating another Great Debate, this time about how banking and finance could help us meet human needs.

There is choice and diversity within this comprehensive system but we hear very little advocacy of greater competition or market incentives. There is friendly rivalry between different parts of the service as they strive to offer the best to their communities but this is combined with a commitment to sharing what they do best to help the whole service improve.

### **Conclusion: making our path**

These are just two of many possible alternative futures for education. If we want a future shaped by us rather than by the market, then voting in the general election is only the start. We need to use democratic means to decide where we want to go as well as to help get us there. In one of his poems, the Spanish poet Antonio Machado says: 'there is no path, the path is made by walking'.

Maybe it's time to start walking ...

### **Note**

- [1] Article by David Pavett for Education for Everyone:  
<https://eduvery.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/teacher-quality-and-education-structures/>

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