
The Realistic Possibility of a Labour Government Led by Jeremy Corbyn Means We Could Get Rid of Academies for Good

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ABSTRACT A National Education Service has to fix the multiple problems created by a fragmented and fractured system which has been completely undermined by academisation. This article argues there can be no ambivalence about bringing academy schools back into a local authority system, but that a future Labour government must also reinvigorate what democratic participation and accountability mean in a local government model.

This article is an attempt to map the present stage in the fast-moving debate about future policy directions for academies. It comes in three parts. It begins with an outline of a range of current positions on academies. The second part examines the possible implications of new local authority–school partnerships for the future of the ‘middle tier’. It concludes with the case for the abolition of academies and the introduction of participatory democracy into local education policy-making.

The academies programme has transformed the structure and governance of the English school system. Yet the evidence does not support the Conservatives’ claim that academies are more educationally effective than local authority schools. According to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report ‘Academies and Maintained Schools: what do we know?’ (Gee & Wespieser, 2017, p. 1), ‘Evidence on the performance of academies compared to local authority schools is mixed, but on the whole suggests there is no substantial difference in performance.’ And the lack of public accountability has led to cases of enrichment and corruption by those in control. According to the summary of the Committee of Public Accounts’ (2018) report ‘Academy Schools’ Finance’:

Academy trusts are educating increasing numbers of children and handling large amounts of public money. The cost to pupils and the taxpayer of failure are particularly high for multi-academy trusts. It is therefore crucial that they show the highest standards of governance,

accountability and financial management. Too often academy trusts are falling short of these standards and the Department for Education (the Department) is too slow to react.

Labour's plan to create a National Education Service (NES) is a very positive development: not just individual reforms but a transformation of the whole education system from early years provision to adult learning. The Labour Party Manifesto *Towards a National Education Service* (2017b) and the *10-point Charter for the National Education Service* (2017a) contain many policies which should be supported. But what do they say about academies? The *10-point Charter* says:

Labour will not waste money on inefficient free schools... We will ... oppose any attempt to force schools to become academies.

Labour will ensure that all schools are democratically accountable, including appropriate controls to see that they serve the public interest and their local communities.

Towards a National Education Service uses almost identical wording. The NES establishes the principle of a local democratically accountable school system. But there is no commitment to abolish academies and free schools and return them to a local authority system.

This is in contrast to the position taken by Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leadership candidate in 2015: 'I am not a supporter of the principle of free schools and academies, and I would want to bring them all back into the local authority orbit' (*Guardian*, 7 July). In a speech to Labour councillors in Nottingham on 3 February 2018, Jeremy Corbyn, speaking against the privatisation of public services, said:

It's about time we acknowledged a truth we all know – when it comes to running public services it's the public sector that works best, that delivers for the many, not the few, accountable to the public and acting in the public interest. (Corbyn, 2018)

The realistic possibility of a Labour government led by Corbyn opens up a new perspective for the campaign against academies. Until now it has been largely a defensive campaign against individual academisation proposals, coupled with evidence-based critiques of academy performance and accountability. Now there is the possibility of a government which would abolish the status of academies, restore control of schools to their elected governing bodies and create a universal state-funded system accountable to reinvigorated and reformed elected local authorities. But this requires strengthening the NES to include that commitment.

No Commitment to Abolish Academies

Corbyn's pledge in 2015 to abolish academy status was in contrast to the positions of the three other candidates from the centre or right of the party –

Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall – who gave no such commitment. Today, three years later, Angela Rayner, Labour's current shadow secretary of state for education, remains silent on this crucial issue of the structure of the future school system under Labour, including in her speech at Labour's annual conference in September 2017. It was the subject of a report by Sheila Doré, a delegate to the conference, in *Education Politics*, the journal of the Socialist Educational Association, the Labour Party-affiliated organisation.

There was no reference to bringing an end to grammar schools or to bringing academies and 'free schools' back under democratic accountability of local authorities.

I attended several education Fringe meetings and asked Angela Rayner how she was going to set up a National Education Service when more than half of schools were now run by private academy trusts. I asked her to commit to renationalisation of the education service along the lines of John McDonnell's other renationalisation pledges.

It was a good conference but Angela Rayner's speech made it clear that there is much for the Socialist Educational Association to do. We must ensure that a Corbyn led Labour government provides us with a genuine socialist programme for education – a debate about private education, the conversion of grammar schools into genuine comprehensive schools, the return of academies and 'free schools' to local democratic accountability and a wide ranging, balanced curriculum that provides all learners with the opportunity to develop all their skills and abilities, academic, cultural and physical. (Doré, 2017, p. 5)

Angela Rayner was the speaker at the launch of Birmingham Labour Party's local election manifesto on 27 March 2018. In question time I asked her if she would give a commitment to end academies and free schools and return them to a democratic local authority system (and also end grammar schools). The question was applauded by the 60 or so Labour supporters there but she avoided giving any commitment, saying that the focus of the NES is on values not specific policies and 'what is important is a good local school'. It is a repeat of New Labour's mantra of 'standards not structures'.

Labour Party policy is made through an annual policy process with draft policies produced by the National Policy Forum, which has a number of commissions on various topics, including the Early Years, Education and Skills Policy Commission. This body has a membership of around 30, ranging across the political spectrum of the party. In 2017 the right and the self-defined 'centre' of the Labour Party had a majority and this resulted in a policy document which did not call for the abolition of academy status. This is Sheila Doré's report of its rejection at the Labour Party annual conference in September 2017:

The National Policy Forum (NPF) document stating that 'Labour's policy should be about raising standards in all schools regardless of type' was moved for a reference back in an excellent speech by a delegate from Colne Valley since it automatically assumes that Labour has unquestioningly accepted the existence of academies and 'free schools' despite inequity, inefficiency, corruption and lack of democratic accountability represented by these schools. The reference back was overwhelmingly carried by conference so the NPF will need to recast its position on this for next year's conference. (Doré, 2017, p. 5)

It is significant that the NPF policy was decisively rejected by Labour Party activists, and it foreshadows the same outcome this year unless there is a radical change of policy.

There is one other Labour Party body which may have influence on policy on academies: the recently announced 'inquiry into school improvement, accountability and oversight', which is chaired by Lucy Powell MP, chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party Backbench Education Committee. In March 2018 Powell explained:

This PLP Inquiry will give us a chance to discuss the principles of what our school oversight and accountability policy should be and how we can flesh out our plans ahead of the next General Election. ... Key themes that we will explore will include how schools can be better-accountable to parents and local communities... (Powell, 2018)

Powell is a supporter of Progress, the pressure group on the right of the party. She had been education secretary in Jeremy Corbyn's shadow cabinet but resigned from it, along with eight other shadow cabinet members, in June 2016 in an attempt to force Corbyn out as leader of the Party. Her resignation statement said: 'it is increasingly clear that your position is untenable and that you are unable to command the support of the shadow Cabinet, the Parliamentary Labour Party and, most importantly, the country' (BBC News, 28 June 2016.) A year later, having seen her majority increase by more than 9000 in the 2015 election, she said she was 'really glad' that 'we got it wrong on Jeremy Corbyn' (BBC News, 9 June 2017).

Powell has no record of calling for the abolition of academy status. Speaking as shadow education secretary in the parliamentary debate following the government's Schools White Paper on forced academisation in 2016, she said:

If we want to avoid more of the scandals we've seen, like at Perry Beaches, Kings Science Academy, and E-ACT, and if schools are genuinely to be held to account, then we need a much more robust governance regime than remote Trustee Boards appointed by their Executive, held only to account by a Regional School

Commissioner, who is responsible for overseeing thousands of schools. (Powell, 2016)

Powell's solution was more regulation of academies. There was no call to ensure democratic accountability by abolishing academy status and reintegrating them into their local authorities.

For the Abolition of Academies

A contrasting position is advanced by the Socialist Educational Association (SEA). Its most recent statement on academies is in its draft response to the Labour Party's Education Policy Commission Consultation:

The most fundamental barriers which prevent effective co-operation are:

- The system of multi academy trusts.
- ... the lack of a local democratic framework for education.

Actions designed to promote co-operation would include:

- end the privatisation of schools and colleges in particular through the academy system. (SEA, 2018)

Of the teachers' unions the National Union of Teachers – now the National Education Union (NEU) – has the most forthright position of opposition to academies and a consistent record of active campaigning against them. At this year's annual Easter conference Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the NEU, said:

The NEU is demanding that schools are returned to their local authority family of schools. This is the only way to restore the public service ethos in education, guarantee a high-quality education for all children and young people in England's schools, and ensure the accountability and public probity that parents and communities are entitled to expect of their education service. (Quoted in *TES*, 31 March 2018)

The NEU conference resolution headed 'Academies, MATs, Re-Broker, Rebrand or Renationalise' said in part:

Conference instructs the NUT Executive and its representatives of the JEC [Joint Executive Committee] of the NEU to:

... v. Demand from Government that academy schools be brought back within local authority family of schools and properly funded as a key priority for the union;

vi. Vigorously lobby and campaign for the Labour Party and other parties to build the widest possible coalition of opposition to back these demands and make the restoration of academy schools to

democratic oversight of the local authority with support and financial control and accounting procedure, with proper funding, a key part of its education policy. (NEU, 2018)

In contrast, neither of the two headteachers' unions, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), has a position of abolishing academies, perhaps because many of their members (the majority in the case of ASCL) are heads of academies.

Academies: regulated, not abolished?

The Campaign for State Education is a long-standing pressure group broadly aligned with the traditional centre of the Labour Party. Its most recent publication is 'There's still a lot of work to do but let's hear it for the national education service' by Melissa Benn, written in September 2017 (Benn, 2017). She argues that 'some of the famed freedoms of academies and free schools, which so often give them a dodgy advantage in the chaotic schools market, should be removed. And given the multiplicity of confusing labels, is it not time to call all schools "schools" and give them the same rights and freedoms?' But this does not explicitly call for, and does not necessarily entail, an end to academy status, even if their title is removed, or even an end to control of academy chains by private organisations.

The Reclaiming Education alliance is a coalition of pressure groups for school reform which comprises the Alliance for Inclusive Education, the Campaign for State Education, Comprehensive Future, *FORUM* (3-19 Comprehensive Education magazine), Information for School and College Governors, the New Visions Group, Rescue Our Schools and the SEA. The Reclaiming Education alliance believes that 'developing an NES is a significant policy development' and proposes 'An Education Programme for Labour' (Reclaiming Education, 2018):

Initial priorities

... 2. We will immediately halt the academies and free schools programme and return the responsibility for meeting the need for school places to local authorities. We will remove the clauses in the Education Act 2011 which prevent local authorities from building schools.

Local Accountability

... 7. We will create a comprehensive statutory framework fit for a new National Education Service covering all state-funded schools, subject to appropriate Parliamentary scrutiny.
8. The framework will make clear local authorities' responsibility for the strategic management of an education service.
9. We recognise the key role of stakeholders in the effective running of schools. We will publish a code of practice that requires all

schools to have governance arrangements that represent parents, their children, staff and the wider community and ensure that all state funded schools abide by it.

... 12. We will ensure that the overwhelming proportion of public funding is spent on front-line staff and withdraw funding from organisations that pay very high and unjustifiable salaries.

This proposes a statutory framework comprising a series of regulatory measures, but does not specify their powers. Local authorities' responsibility for strategic management could mean just extending current statutory responsibilities for maintained schools to cover academies, together with control over admissions. Academies could have – and many do now – 'governance arrangements that represent parents, their children, staff and the wider community' while still leaving power in the hands of the trustees and chains. To 'withdraw funding from organisations that pay very high and unjustifiable salaries' is obviously aimed at academy chains, but it implies that such organisations will be allowed to continue to run schools provided there is a ceiling on their directors' salaries.

Accountability to Local Authorities or to a New 'Middle-tier' Body?

The NES establishes the principle of a local democratically accountable school system, but neither the *10-point Charter* nor *Towards a National Education Service* stipulates that it entails the integration of academies into their local authority system of schools. Writing for the Campaign for State Education (CASE), Melissa Benn says 'we need a lot more detail about the structures that would underpin the NES. Interestingly, there is little talk from the Labour front bench about a return to a seventies-style relationship between school and local authorities' (Benn, 2017).

The SEA in its draft response to the National Policy Forum's education consultation calls for an end to 'privatisation of schools and colleges in particular through the academy system', but it too is not specific about the role of local authorities. It says: that '[l]ocal accountability should be to democratically elected bodies' which should have 'the responsibility for planning and ensuring the effective delivery of educational provision across all ages and phases for their area' (SEA, 2018). The NEU-NUT also leaves open the question of the form that local democratic control should take. Its 2018 conference resolution says that 'there are many complex structures and processes that need to be changed and brought back under democratic accountable control, and that simply returning to previous models may not be the best answer' (NEU, 2018)

The Anti-Academies Alliance has of course been committed to the abolition of academies and to campaigning against the academisation of local authority schools since the beginning of the Conservative-led academies programme. It has recently initiated a campaign for Labour's National

Education Service entitled 'Let's Build a National Education Service Together'. But it too is ambivalent about what local democratic accountability might mean:

The question of the 'middle tier' must be central to any discussions about an NES, not only because the chaos caused by deregulation needs fixing but also because any hope of delivering real change and real social justice will require either a return to Local Authorities or some sort of elected and accountable local education authority. (Anti-Academies Alliance, 2018)

The New Local Authority–School Partnerships

The election of the Conservative-led government in 2010 unleashed a policy agenda which has transformed the local authority school system – in particular, through the combination of the spread of academies, local authority budget cuts and the pressure from Ofsted on 'standards' in schools, for which it held local authorities partly responsible. The year-on-year cuts in local authority funding from central government, which have continued up to the present, have reduced the capacity of local authorities to provide much support to schools directly, except in the form of traded services, and they have become largely reliant on brokering school-to-school support. But local authorities have been reluctant to abandon involvement in their local school system not just because of their legal responsibilities but because of a commitment to the idea of a local schools system which is more than a fragmented aggregation of schools and which is integral to councils' overall civic functions and identity.

Many local authorities have responded by constructing a new partnership organisation involving all the maintained schools, and often the academies as well, in their area. The core purpose of the new partnerships is 'school improvement', and in particular supporting schools which have received, or are at risk of receiving, adverse Ofsted judgements. The principle is that schools are best placed to be the agents of raising standards. Could these new partnerships provide the basis or prototype for a new form of local accountability? Two examples of these local authority–schools partnerships are Liverpool, one of the earliest, and Hackney, currently in the process of establishing one.

Liverpool was one of the first authorities to create a substantial new partnership organisation. The Liverpool Learning Partnership was set up in 2012. It includes 99% of all the schools in the city, including the dozen or so secondary academies, in a new partnership with the local authority. The LLP is a limited company with charitable status, governed by an executive board chaired by a primary school headteacher with representatives from all phases of education, the City of Liverpool College, the Diocese and the Archdiocese, Liverpool Governors' Forum, the Local Authority and its trading company School Improvement Liverpool.

In July 2013 'From Better to Best', the report of the Mayor of Liverpool's Education Commission, chaired by Estelle Morris, was published, endorsed by the city's headteachers. The first recommendation of the report was that the

‘Liverpool Learning Partnership should be acknowledged as the lead agency in the development of the strategic vision for education in the city’ (Mayor of Liverpool, 2013, p. 54). This remit is wider and more ambitious than just ‘school improvement’, but the priorities of the LLP largely revolve around the standards agenda, though with one significant addition: coordinating the work of the Liverpool Cultural Education Partnership (Liverpool Learning Partnership, 2018).

In 2002 Hackney Council’s responsibility for schools was handed over to an independent body, the Learning Trust. In 2012, after a decade in which Hackney’s schools showed significantly improved results, the Learning Trust’s contract ended and the service was restored to the local authority, which created the Hackney Learning Trust as the department of the council responsible for school education. Hackney currently has seven maintained secondary schools and nine academies, and 58 primary schools of which 52 are maintained schools.

Hackney Local Authority Hands Over Strategic Leadership to Schools

On 18 December 2017 Hackney Council’s Cabinet agreed a new policy: ‘A New Direction for Hackney Schools: supporting the establishment of a New Hackney Schools Group under the School Federation Regulations’ (Hackney Council, 2017). According to the Cabinet member’s introduction at the meeting, the Hackney Schools Group is described as

a new type of local partnership – one where:

Locally maintained schools work together in a new collective governance framework to provide the leadership, challenge and support necessary to improve the school system; and the local authority provides the accountability, system mediation and infrastructure... (Cabinet meeting agenda pack, Hackney Council, 2017, p. 187)

In January 2018 the local authority published a ‘Hackney Schools Group Vision Statement’ about the new partnership:

This will place schools collectively in the role of system leaders at the heart of the local education system, supported by the Council’s continued provision of accountability, mediation and support. The Hackney Schools Group is not an additional layer of oversight for schools, it is the realisation of a shift in leadership in the system from the local authority to schools. (Hackney Council, 2018b, p. 2)

We will create a professional, high calibre Executive Board for the Hackney Schools Group that provides the strategic planning and oversight for the school system. A management team, supported by the Council through the ‘maintained’ schools relationship, will also

provide the operational support and infrastructure to schools. This will leave Headteachers free to focus on running their own schools and supporting others. (Hackney Council, 2018b, pp. 2-3)

Also in January 2018 Hackney Council published 'Hackney New Schools Group Proposal Questions & Answers' (last updated 24 January 2018):

Research and evidence all points to the conclusion that, to continue to improve, a good local system should become 'school led'. We believe this is the best opportunity to create the conditions in Hackney for a credible and successful school led system – with leadership, authority and capacity vested in the Board of the new Hackney Schools Group, backed up by the local accountability, system mediation and infrastructure that the authority provides in a maintained system. (Hackney Council, 2018a, p. 2)

The new Hackney Schools Group Executive Board, as a legal entity, would be formally accountable to the local authority. Schools or existing federations in the new group would be accountable to the Schools Group Board, not the local authority. This is a significant part of the realisation of a shift in leadership in the system away from the local authority to schools. (Hackney Council, 2018a, pp. 3-4)

The Board for the Hackney Schools Group will take the leadership role for the schools group and, as a consequence, for the wider schools system. This would encompass strategic planning, including development and performance, as well as oversight of school improvement, including monitoring, challenge, support and intervention. The Council would hold the Schools Group Board to account and provide system mediation alongside the Schools Group. At this stage, the detail of much of this is to be worked out in conjunction with school, HLT [Hackney Learning Trust] and Council officers. (Hackney Council, 2018a, p. 4)

The key innovation of the new Hackney model is that strategic leadership of the local authority school system is transferred from the local authority to the schools, represented by the executive board. While '[i]t is too early at this stage to determine who would be on the board as the proposal has yet to be discussed with schools' (Hackney Council, 2018a, p. 5), it is evident that 'schools' actually means 'headteachers' and they are intended to comprise the majority of board members.

What is the place of academies in the new Hackney model? According to the Hackney Schools Group Vision Statement, 'Academies and Free Schools will also be able to participate in the work of the Hackney Schools Group by association' (Hackney Council, 2018b, p. 3). What form this might take is not

explained. But the relative structural autonomy of the Hackney Schools Group from the local authority opens up the possibility of a solution to the problem of the ‘middle tier’ for those who balk at calling for the abolition of academy status but want to see a return by all state schools, including academies, to some form of accountability to their local authority. Melissa Benn has suggested that the Labour Party should consider ‘an intelligent remodelling of the “middle tier” approach, based on successful experiments like that in Hackney in London where ... the council now holds together academies and maintained schools in a locally accountable frame’ (Benn, 2017). Benn is not correct in claiming that academies in Hackney are ‘locally accountable’ to the council. As an earlier consultation document of the council explains, ‘Academy schools operate independently from the Council and are accountable to central government’ (Hackney Council, 2016). But Benn’s proposal anticipates what the Hackney model could easily be modified to achieve. It is possible to see that school-led partnerships such as in Liverpool and Hackney, with formal accountability to the local authority but effectively having strategic management of the local school system, could provide prototypes of a new local school system under a Labour government in which academies, subjected to some tighter regulation, could continue, including those controlled by private organisations. It would provide the political compromise currently sought by those aligned with the self-defined centre and right of the Labour Party.

A Policy for Labour to Abolish Academies and Democratise Local Authorities

In contrast, a policy to abolish the status of academies would entail the following measures to be taken by a Labour government. Terminate the funding agreements of academies and transfer the schools, their land and premises to their relevant local authorities. Introduce legislation to remove all powers over the governance of schools by academy trusts, including academy chains and MATs (multi-academy trusts), and restore the control of state-funded schools to their duly constituted governing bodies, which shall include a majority of elected representatives of parents, staff and the local community. Abolish the role of Regional Schools Commissioners. Integrate all state-funded schools into a reformed local authority system which is democratically accountable to its local electorate and which is properly funded and staffed to enable it to carry out its functions. These would include monitoring schools, providing appropriate support to schools, parents, children and young people, connecting the local school system to other relevant agencies and sectors, and promoting progressive policies, while respecting schools’ independence. (It may be advantageous for smaller local authorities to collaborate together to provide some of these functions.)

Many schools have collaborated together in various ways, including as MATs, and Labour should encourage schools to work together, including having the option of forming partnerships, provided that ultimate control

remains with individual schools' governing bodies. Some schools may have received support from external academy organisations which they would wish to continue. Schools are of course free to purchase the provision of support from any external organisation, and that should include ex-academy trusts if they continue to offer it. It is a matter for the school governing body to decide.

The reintegration of academies into their local authority school systems would need to be a carefully managed phased process ensuring that there was as little disruption to the schools as possible and that local authorities had the capacity to fulfil their additional responsibilities, which would require a reversal of the massive cuts imposed by central government on local authority budgets.

What Should Local Democratic Accountability Mean?

But the abolition of academy status is only the precondition for a school system which is locally democratically accountable. Two questions have to be addressed: what should schools be accountable for, and who should decide?

The transformation of education in England by a neoliberal agenda combining performativity and marketisation, which emerged under New Labour and has been fully realised by the subsequent Conservative governments, has given rise to a large body of responses which develop a case for a very different and progressive vision of education. One of the best-known examples is *Radical Education and the Common School: a democratic alternative* by Michael Fielding and Peter Moss (2011). One extract will serve to indicate the basis of an alternative vision. They propose four imperatives as the basis of the curriculum:

The first is a focus on the purposes of education, organising the curriculum around that which is necessary for a sustainable, flourishing and democratic way of life. The second has to do with equipping young people and adults with the desire and capacity to seriously and critically interrogate what is given and co-construct a knowledge that assists us in leading good and joyful lives together. The third argues that while knowledge must transcend the local, it must, nonetheless, start with the cultures, concerns and hopes of the communities that the school serves. (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 81)

The fourth imperative is a curriculum that emphasises connectedness.

My second question is who should decide the vision for the local school system? Who should participate at the local level in the making of the curriculum within an equitable national framework? The school partnerships exemplified by Liverpool and Hackney tend to be dominated by headteachers. In some cases there is representation of other stakeholders such as school governors. But there is seldom if ever representation of teachers, support staff, the school unions or parents. It tends to be an exclusive and managerialist model.

For Fielding and Moss, the local authority 'should have responsibility for the education of its children, indeed more broadly for the relationship between

its children and the community. This does not mean going back to a situation where local authorities manage schools directly. Schools should be democratically managed in a system of governance marked by decentralisation and widespread participation, by children and adults, teachers and parents, school and local communities' (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 123). On that basis, 'local authorities define a local cultural project of education for their community, a collective vision for the area, in relationship with schools, local communities and citizens' (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 124).

The fundamental principle should be that every citizen has a stake in, and therefore should have a voice in, their local school system as well as their local school. Potentially the most powerful source of support at the local level for more progressive and egalitarian education policies by schools and local authorities is pressure for them from parents and communities, and the most effective strategy for developing and mobilising it is their participation in local education policy-making, but this is precisely what is ruled out by their deliberate exclusion by headteachers and local authorities from their managerial model of partnership.

That establishes the principle, but the problem is that local authorities aren't very democratic: they offer little opportunity for participatory debate and involvement in the policy process. In part this is because of top-down control by government, as the SEA acknowledges in its call for 'a comprehensive review of local and regional government in England with a view to devolving more decision making to local areas in ways that are consistent and efficient' (SEA, 2018). But it is also because the structures and procedures of local councils are highly bureaucratic, hierarchical and in general not hospitable to independent popular participation in decision-making. As Colin Copus says, 'If public engagement supports councillors' preferred policy option, it is a useful tool; if it does not, the views expressed are likely to be marginalised or ignored' (Copus, 2010, p. 588). Thus, for Fielding and Moss, 'the development of radical education and the common school needs to go hand-in-hand with the renewal and development of democratic local government, which in our view has to include an active and innovative role in education' (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 127).

This entails a radical redefinition of the concept of 'accountability'. Fielding and Moss say that 'in today's neoliberal climate, "accountability" is widely understood in a predominantly contractual and legal sense as "a largely negative instrument of political and social control"' (Fielding & Moss, 2011, p. 123). In her book *Reclaiming Local Democracy*, Ines Newman points out that 'Unlike "democracy", "accountability" separates out the state and society and can be exercised with no participation by citizens in the decision-making process' (Newman, 2014, p. 103). 'The concept of democracy demands the active involvement of diverse citizens in determining policy. It also demands institutions that address the current power inequalities that allow elites to dominate the policymaking process. It therefore involves both representative and participative democracy' (Newman, 2014, p. 104). 'If democracy is to be

reclaimed, councillors will need to address power inequalities and to increase the capacity of individuals or groups to engage in the policy process' (Newman, 2014, p. 101).

What institutional form is needed in which all stakeholders in the local education system can participate? What is needed is a Local Education Forum: a body in each local authority area open to all with an interest in education, including, of course, teachers and other school workers, school governors, parents and school students, as well as councillors, other education-related agencies and employers. Its purpose would be to discuss and take positions on all key policy issues. Its mode of operating would be based on participative deliberative democracy. There is a rich national and international body of relevant experience to draw on, including measures to ensure that participation is not biased by class, gender and other inequalities. The details of each Local Education Forum's constitution and procedures would need working out locally.

But community-wide public and professional participation in discussion about education is fruitless unless there is a means to feed it into and influence council policy. Under the Cabinet and Scrutiny System introduced by Blair, power lies in the hands of the small group of Cabinet members. Each local authority has a Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee which comprises councillors and also representatives of parent governors and of religious bodies involved in education. There may also be co-opted members. Apart from this, citizens, including parents and education professionals, are almost entirely excluded from any influence in the education policy-making process. In December 2017 the Parliamentary Communities and Local Government Committee published a report reviewing council scrutiny arrangements, entitled 'Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees' (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2017). It concluded that scrutiny is often held in low esteem, with little influence on council policy, and that local government needs a cultural change to allow the scrutiny process to work properly.

In fact, a more thoroughgoing and radical reform is needed to democratise the existing structures and processes of local government, based on a new combination of representative and participatory democracy (an issue which the Labour Party has yet to address). There would need to be formal procedures to feed the deliberations of the Local Education Forum into the council's decision-making process. An initial step would be to open up the scrutiny committee responsible for education, as well as its 'task and finish' sub-groups, to lay members elected from the Local Education Forum and also from the schools partnership body, with at least an advisory role, with the right to speak, to access information, to put items on the agenda and to make proposals. The scrutiny committee could take on a more proactive role in formulating and developing policy, not just scrutinising existing policy, or councils could return to a committee model, reformed to ensure effective public and professional participation.

It has to be recognised that for headteachers the reforms proposed above may be contentious. The existing and emerging partnership models are largely controlled by headteachers. Why should they agree to handing powers back to the local authority, and in particular to one which is itself subject to popular participation and pressure through the forum? They may be reluctant to concede local authority influence over anything more than admissions policy and the provision of school places. They need to feel confident that they could have a meaningful influence in co-constructing local authority policy, through the forum and through representation on a reconstructed scrutiny committee. Concerns about the professional capacities of the newly reformed local authorities could be alleviated by a policy of secondment of headteachers and teachers to the local authority. Furthermore, public participation in local education policy-making does not mean intervening in issues which are properly matters of professional judgement. Nor does it imply that public views are inevitably progressive. In both cases, it is a question of deliberation and negotiation among the public and the professionals, and the mobilisation of collective popular and professional support for progressive policies.

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