Valuing teachers
Valuing education
Valuing teachers, valuing education
An education statement from the National Union of Teachers

Foreword
We become teachers because we believe education can make a difference. We want to make that difference. We want to have a positive influence on individual pupils, whole classes and cohorts of young people and on society at large. We do believe that education has the power to liberate individuals and that it enhances the lives of all.

This education statement is published drawing on the policies, knowledge and experience of the National Union of Teachers.

In a recent edition of The Teacher, Ken Loach wrote: “Teachers know the problems in schools and education better than anyone else. They mustn’t be afraid to go back to first principles of what makes a good education and define and defend that alongside their pay and conditions.”

The NUT must always be at the centre of the debate about education. Please help to keep us there by doing what NUT members do so well: talk about education. Teachers talking and generating ideas can be a powerful force.

I believe this is a good statement but for it to have impact, it has to have currency amongst NUT members and beyond. I invite you, therefore, to read it in your school or in your association and to engage with the principles and proposals which arise. The Union wants this statement to be the authentic voice of the classroom and to be the document on which we rely when pressing the case for policy approaches with politicians.

I look forward to hearing from members everywhere about your discussions of this document. You can respond by emailing valuing@nut.org.uk

CHRISTINE BLOWER
General Secretary
Introduction
Since its establishment in 1870, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) has believed that what is good for teachers, is good for children and education. Children’s learning conditions are teachers’ working conditions and we want both to be of high quality.

This document articulates what we believe about education based on decades of experience, dedication and commitment to the education of children. Our vision is underpinned by a commitment to high quality education as a human right, provided as a public service, available free to all without discrimination, and to a high professional status for teachers.

The purpose of education
The purpose of education is to support pupils’ growth towards ethically responsible membership of society. Education provides them with the knowledge and skills needed for life.

Education is a human and civil right and a public good in its own right. Education enables everyone at all stages of life to achieve their maximum potential and better understand themselves and others, and their roles and relationships. Education also plays a central role in the creation of new knowledge and the appreciation of culture through creativity.

Enabling teachers and school leaders to give their best
Reliable international evidence tells us that there are a number of things a country needs to do to ensure that:

• young people succeed and thrive
• schools excel
• teachers and school leaders derive great satisfaction from their profession and take pride in it.
This happens in countries where:

- society values education
- there is broad political consensus on educational policy which is developed in consultation with practitioners
- teachers are educated and professionally trained
- teachers are highly regarded and trusted as professionals
- education policy is based on compelling evidence
- schools and teachers enjoy significant autonomy
- the curriculum is flexible
- all the partners in education collaborate and cooperate
- teachers and leaders are seen as life-long learners with guaranteed professional development throughout their careers
- schools are comprehensive, democratic and non-selective
- every child goes to their local school
- teachers and school leaders are considered experts in the field of education and enjoy considerable independence in the classroom.

We believe these are characteristics on which our education system should be based.

“By the elevation of the teacher we elevate the value of education, and accelerate the progress of civilisation.”

Mr John J Graves, Inaugural President, NUT
10th September 1870
Starting right: a rich and fruitful life begins with quality early childhood education

Early childhood is the most critical period in human development because it is the time when the foundations for a child’s future are laid down. Quality early childhood education (ECE) can make a significant contribution to the physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child, including the acquisition of languages and early literacy. Children are active learners from the day they are born, and the early years are vital to their success in school and later in life.

Good quality ECE is especially important for children who have not had the same advantages and positive experiences as some others. Quality ECE can help meet the educational, developmental, health and nutritional needs of such disadvantaged children and help to equalise their opportunities later in life.

High quality ECE is an important part of every child’s right to education. The fundamental principles are that ECE should:

• be provided free of charge and be available to all children
• be a valued and respected public service and an integral part of the education system
• be provided by high quality trained teachers and support staff
• provide high quality, appropriate facilities and equipment for young children, including indoor and outdoor play spaces
• provide a curriculum framework which is holistic and designed to meet the educational, developmental, nutritional, health and individual needs of children
• value play, creativity and exploration. Play is an essential part of growing up. Through play, children learn more about themselves, their relationships with others and the wider world. Play helps to consolidate what has been learnt in the classroom and enables children to develop effective risk management, good coordination skills and thinking for themselves.
The school curriculum

International evidence, as well as common sense, tells us that the best way to develop the curriculum is for it to be nationally framed and locally delivered. The curriculum should be broad and balanced and include the full range of subjects with freedom for teachers and schools to organise learning according to pupils’ individual needs and circumstances.

Reading for pleasure is a fundamental part of childhood and lifelong learning. Children deserve a rich curriculum, that encourages extensive reading of whole books. The active encouragement of reading for pleasure should be a core part of every child’s educational entitlement, whatever their background or attainment.

A national framework for the curriculum must act as a mirror and a window to:

• allow pupils to recognise themselves and their identities as well as enable them to understand the wider world
• be flexible to enable innovation at school level (space to ‘try things out’)
• show a clear relationship between academic research and action research (teachers’ own research in real contexts) and the curriculum on offer
• be relevant, enjoyable and intellectually challenging
• be broad and balanced
• connect knowledge to life outside school
• lend itself to a variety of teaching methods
• have the pupils’ voice at its heart

“Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.” Martin Luther King Jr

“The quality of an education system cannot exceed that of its teachers.” OECD
• have a fine balance between arts, humanities, sciences, vocational, technological and languages education
• promote life-long learning together with links to the world of work and to further higher education
• recognise and promote learning outside the classroom.

Young people are growing up in a rapidly changing society. Their education must:
• prepare them to thrive in a multicultural society with citizens from a variety of religious beliefs, cultures and languages, and to be able to question and challenge racist prejudice and stereotypes
• teach them that men and women should be valued equally, that gender roles are continuing to change and that girls and boys are individuals who should not be constrained by stereotypes about femininity and masculinity
• encourage them to value their fellow pupils equally, whatever their abilities and differences, and to understand that disabled people are disabled by attitudes and barriers within society and not by their medical conditions
• acknowledge that sexual orientation is a positive facet of human identity and explicitly recognise that some students and adults are straight and that some are bisexual, gay or lesbian or trans, but all are equal.

Stereotypes about gender, race, religion, disability and sexual orientation continue to limit the aspirations and dreams of many children and young people. This must change.

Through a rich curriculum and an inclusive ethos, education can challenge stereotypes. Teaching can celebrate diversity and difference while at the same time promoting common human rights and shared human values. Education can give children and young people the resilience and appetite to want to build a fairer world for their generation and the next, based on social justice and equal rights.
All children have the right to develop and enjoy their learning in an inspiring, challenging and nurturing environment. Our education system and our schools need to be flexible to mould and stretch to reflect the many different ways those children and young people grow and learn.

In school, children and young people should have the staff, resources and facilities they need to access a high quality education and be involved in the life of the school. For children with special educational needs and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and for some disabled children, this may mean having access to more than one school or attending special provision. For young people who are not in school because of medical or behavioural issues, or because they have been excluded or are parents themselves, there needs to be well funded public sector alternative provision which can provide personalised learning.

**Assessment**

Good assessment is one of the essential tools of effective learning and teaching. The assessment process must be effectively carried out, well designed and fitted to the intended purpose. Assessment should support learning – learning should not be driven by assessment.

Assessment should:

- be seen as a key professional skill for teachers
- be part of effective planning of teaching and learning
- promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed
- be recognised as central to classroom practice
- focus on how students learn

“Early childhood education should nurture the creative spirit and generous joy of childhood.”

Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Laureate for Literature
• provide constructive guidance about how to improve
• develop learners’ capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing
• take account of the importance of learner motivation
• be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact
• recognise the full range of achievement of all learners.

School leadership
Effective school leadership is essential. School leaders have a high level of responsibility and their job places many demands on them. Evidence suggests that individuals in jobs with those kinds of responsibilities need a high level of freedom, trust and status in order to achieve, excel and thrive.

Good leaders ensure that:
• schools are well run, and play a crucial role in facilitating effective learning and teaching
• the needs of all learners are met, and have high expectations for their educational success
• schools are the heart of their communities and command parental and community support
• every teacher and education professional is able to access the means to develop and enhance their skills and expertise.

International evidence points to the excellent job our teachers and school leaders are doing. A recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Preparing School Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century, ranked school leaders in the UK extremely favourably relative to peers in 33 other ‘developed’ OECD countries in a range of areas, and placed them at the top of an overall ‘leadership index’.
We need an education service that can build on the success of our school leaders, as demonstrated by the OECD study, in the following ways:

• education policy should encourage, facilitate and reward co-operation and collaboration between schools, to enable the dissemination of good practice, and for schools to actively assist each other to achieve high standards in every school

• school leaders should be enabled to work across boundaries to improve their own institutions, and to improve the education service and school leadership in a more universal way. This includes facilitating the recruitment of subsequent generations of school leaders.

• leadership should be accountable through democratic structures such as elected local bodies, governing bodies, parents and the community, and within schools through recognised unions and professional associations, and student councils

• creating incentives for teachers to enter school leadership, including through systems that can support them into leadership positions, and encourage them to progress to the most senior leadership positions. There should be strategies to encourage and support underrepresented groups into leadership positions, so that our school leadership better reflects our diverse communities.

• effective leaders make the best of the talents within the staff at their school by adopting a participative and distributive leadership style.

“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”
Margaret Mead
Accountability

Schools should be well funded, publicly owned and at the centre of their communities. It is vital that they are accountable to the communities they serve through democratically established local mechanisms. They should have accountability to their communities built into their structures, for example through governing bodies with strong representation from parents, teachers, members of the community and, where appropriate, learners, elected by the groups they represent.

Schools must also be accountable not only to their immediate communities, but also nationally. This can be achieved by striking a balance between internal and external school evaluation. Data generated from this process can also facilitate international comparisons.

Evidence shows that there is immense value in a system of school self-evaluation, or internal evaluation. Schools are best placed to assess their own strengths and weaknesses and to develop plans for improvement. It is crucial that internal evaluation:

- is clear in its purpose
- is focused on agreed priorities
- takes into account the circumstances of the school
- provides information for individual and school improvement.

School self-evaluation needs to be accompanied by supportive external evaluation. It is critical that:

- the content, focus and conduct of the external evaluation are discussed and negotiated with the school
- criteria used in the external evaluation are discussed and made meaningful to those to whom they apply
- the process is seen by the school community as worthwhile and supportive of school improvement
- the focus of the external evaluation is primarily on the quality of the school’s own approach to self-improvement and its capacity for change.
External evaluation must ensure consistency across local areas as well as regionally and nationally. The aim should be to create a national education system where every learner, parent and citizen has confidence that their local school is of the highest quality.

**Overarching services for schools**

Centrally determined solutions for schools can only do so much.

Our schools must have local and regional structures that are accountable and supportive, take responsibility for strategy and planning, develop collaborative relationships and partnerships, develop the professionalism of teachers, school staff and school leaders, and ensure fairness for all. This should continue to be the role of local authorities.

Strategic roles that need to be carried out locally include:

- providing school support services
- planning provision for pupils with special educational needs and designing a ‘local offer’ for their parents
- allocating capital
- planning for school places and admissions
- supporting school improvement
- enabling multi-agency working
- encouraging collaborative arrangements for supporting pupils at risk of exclusion
- making education provision for excluded pupils
- supporting schools to implement strategies to eliminate discrimination and advance equality.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Nelson Mandela
Local structures must be able to challenge the best, most effective schools to excel, but should also provide support to improve schools that are struggling to aspire to and achieve the qualities of the best.

The shape and nature of local structures to support schools should be determined democratically at local level, taking into account the views of all stakeholders in the community including teachers and educators, learners, parents, employers and representatives of the community, including those who represent the diversity of the groups present in the community.

**Conclusion**

This statement recognises that education is at the heart of everything we value in society.

All schools need to have the confidence to innovate and draw on the professionalism of all their staff.

For teachers to own change, their professionalism must be respected. At the centre of teachers’ professionalism must be equality of entitlement to professional development.

A curriculum and assessment system that encourages innovation is vital.

The wider public, as well as government, have a right to know how effective the education service is. It is quite possible for accountability to be both rigorous and supportive of schools.

Education is a powerful force in securing equal life chances. Local communities and local authorities should support equality of access to education for all children and young people.
“At a pinch you might be able to do without Parliament. You could do without the Minister. You could certainly do without civil servants… Without any or all of them the world might not seem much worse. But if there were no teachers the world would be back in barbarism within two generations. That simple fact is the measure of the responsibility and privilege which every good teacher should carry with pride.”

George Tomlinson, Minister for Education, 1947

“When you know better you do better.”

Maya Angelou