

THE RIGHT TO LEARN : A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION

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NOTE: The proposals put forward in this document are not necessarily endorsed by every member of the Group but they represent a general consensus and in their totality command strong support.

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THE RIGHT TO LEARN : A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION

1. THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

Any document designed to serve as the basis for discussion of Conservative Party education policy for the mid eighties is unavoidably faced by inherent stumbling-blocks, dating from a long time back. For there is no Conservative Party philosophy of education, sensu stricto, in the way that there are recognisable Conservative approaches to economic policy, labour-law, constitutional questions, the United Kingdom, defence, law and order or Europe. In matters of education - from primary to higher - Conservatives have, as a matter of historical fact, been content to tag along behind the Liberals, and subsequently behind Labour. This has had several unfortunate results - for education and the Conservative Party alike. They have come patently to fruition in recent years, but were a long time gestating.

In matters educational, the Conservatives have appeared primarily as the party of the transient status quo, and secondarily as the party of the public schools and older universities - in a word, of privilege. In post-war British society - as Sir Keith Joseph, among others, has explained so cogently* - clinging to the status quo has invariably meant letting the socialists make the running, whether with a greater or lesser degree of reluctance, tempered by resignation or even the appearance of enthusiasm and one-sided by-partisanship. Hanging on to the status quo, out of the combined - if self-contradictory - convictions that the "clock cannot be turned back", that all change is likely to be for the worse, but that to oppose change too determinedly would court misunderstanding and unpopularity, does not provide propitious ground from which new initiatives can be launched.

*"Stranded on the Middle Ground?"

The Conservative Party's association in the public eye with the older residential public schools, service colleges and ancient universities, and with an apparent lack of understanding for hard-pressed parents in the middle and other ranges of society whose salvation has been the grammar school, has diminished the Party's potential intellectual contribution and moral standing on the issue.

True, Margaret Thatcher has gone on record as claiming that the grammar schools permitted people from her social background to compete with people from the privileged background of Shirley Williams and Tony Benn.

But this remained an obiter dictum, and neither before nor since, has this been the guiding spirit of Conservative policy. Destruction of the opportunities provided by grammar schools are a major issue on which Labour attitudes are now divergent. In some cases their attitudes have been diametrically reversed during our own lifetimes, for example, on the role of education in facilitating social mobility, and - more recently, and contentiously - the desirability of doing so.

It is therefore desirable that there be some recognisable Conservative position on the subject, and that unlike Labour's varieties, it should bear a relation to our views on social mobility and occupational structure in general. Or are large sections of the public to be left with the feeling that one of the two major parties is lukewarm, or even hostile, to personal social mobility, while the other cannot escape its earlier, exclusive association with a privileged minority?

A contributory shortcoming which has resulted from allowing the socialists to make the running, is that Conservatives have found themselves faced with the need to take vital decisions on the basis of tactical and short-term

considerations, without a broader view on which to base a strategy within which tactical choices could be made.

Even under the best of circumstances, a policy document of this kind is faced with dilemmas inherent in conflicting time-scales. We should, on the one hand, be working out educational policies for the rest of the century, for pupils, students and research, whose qualities will go a long way towards determining Britain's fate in the 21st century.

This, properly speaking, should form the framework within which immediate problems should be appraised, and medium-term plans worked out. But because the party has no educational philosophy, nor even a tradition of arguing one out, we have had to fight very hard - and court obloquy and discrimination in Conservative circles no less than from the educational establishment - merely to point out visible shortcomings in the present, largely Socialist inspired, arrangements as they affect pupils and students. There has been no opportunity to present positive philosophies linking education with still wider economic and social perspectives. So in practice, we have to proceed simultaneously with the philosophy, with our long-term perspectives and with medium-term goals and issues of the day.

As the saying goes, we have to start from here, though we should have preferred to start from somewhere else.

ROLLING BACK THE STATE IN EDUCATION

Almost all members of the group work, in one way or another, in the state sector. This is not necessarily from choice, but simply because the state sector has grown in size, resources and scope at the expense of other forms of education, from nursery to higher. We

must judge this development in the light of both of results and of our understanding. Our views are not uniform, but we share values and a general sense of direction.

This group is manned primarily by educators and educationists, who have been drawn from educational affairs to politics, not vice versa. That is to say, the members began with no strong previously-held views on the role of the state in education. Most took it for granted, or even welcomed it. Only as a result of experience, has it become clear to us that the state's excessive and expanding role in education is a major cause of the ills, and that we should aspire to diminish it. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to speak of education - nursery to higher - as a nationalised industry showing many ills common to most or all nationalised industries: supremacy of employees' interests or political whims over the consumers; general hyper-politicisation, including political motivation, interference and nepotism; proliferation of non-productive staff; weakening ratio between input and output; obstacles in the way of measuring or assessing output; a take-it-or-leave-it attitude towards consumers and other groups affected.

As with nationalised industries generally, costs proliferate. Huge bureaucracies, nationally and locally, rarely perform any useful service and in many cases do harm. They are in the main unnecessary, since a good school is self-administering, and there is no reason why most of our schools should not be good.

The number of non-teaching staff proliferates, as does the use of trained teachers on non-teaching duties. Caretakers and auxiliary staff are paid illogically - high salaries for routine duties.

In the Keynesian-style national-accounting systems on which economic measurement and policy are still based, the output of public services is still assumed to be automatically proportional to their input. This untenable assumption must be challenged, and ways of measuring value for money in education and other services instituted. The results would strengthen our hand.

We have to address ourselves to problems created by state-hyertrophy, but without the crippling delusion that we Conservatives can somehow magically make socialism work, where socialists have predictably failed.

THE NEED TO REVERSE THE DECLINE IN QUALITY

The period of the rapid extension of state power and involvement (and we include local authorities as part of the state), which began with the 1944 Education Act - though its effects were not immediately visible - has coincided with a marked and accelerating deterioration of state education at all levels. As R V Jones has argued, The Spens Report of 1938 on secondary education and the Educational White Paper of 1943 advocated that a modified form of the eleven-plus selective examination which had long been instituted for free places at grammar schools should be applied to the whole of eleven-plus education, and this doctrine was incorporated in the 1944 Education Act, so that entry to a grammar school or other special type of education should be based on aptitude alone, independent of social class. 'The son of the dustman shall sit with the son of the Duke' was the theme, and it was the subject of much optimistic propaganda by educationists who seemed almost to rejoice at the discomfiture of middle-class parents whose children were rated below par at eleven-plus.

"Certainly the equality-of-opportunity theme had something to it, as most educational themes have, but it failed to satisfy the majority whose children did not show up well enough to be selected. The result was, as the sponsor of the 1944 Education Act, Lord Butler, has quoted: "the comprehensive system...the fruit of a 'mothers' revolution'" and we have thus had yet another example of J S Mill's dictum that "in sober truth, whatever homage may be professed, or even paid, to real or supposed mental superiority, the general tendency of things throughout the world is to render mediocrity the ascendant power among mankind".

When the William Tyndale school became a national scandal - thanks to the efforts of ordinary parents and despite efforts by the ILEA and the Unions - the Socialist Chairman of the ILEA Schools Committee, a "moderate" by their standards, commented that it was no worse than many others under his jurisdiction.

Hugh Scanlon, one-time Left-wing life-ruler of the Engineering Union said, after taking up his post-retirement appointment dealing with apprentice-training, "it is no longer reactionary to express concern about state education." It will be recalled that Mr Callaghan himself, with his ear to the ground, stepped in and won some popularity by voicing the widespread concern over our schools. In doing so he went over the heads both of his own Secretary of State, Mrs Williams - then busy playing up to the left-wing gallery - and our own education spokesmen, who gave the impression, at least, of being in much the same position.

This process still goes on. The thoughtless over-expansion of higher and other post-secondary education, undertaken in the 'fifties - with too many academics giving narrow professional vested interests priority over the national good - is still continuing. Again as R V Jones has

argued, "Robbins' concepts of the aims of higher education were admirable, but it recommended the doing of too much too quickly by way of expansion. It did not attend carefully enough to one point which had been emphasised by the earlier Barlow Report: 'the quality of our graduates must not be sacrificed to quantity. In few other fields are numbers of so little value compared with quality properly developed'. The Government, however, immediately and uncritically accepted the Robbins recommendations, and allocated substantial funds to their implementation".

"It was obvious from the start that things were likely to go wrong, and they did. The proportion of students in science and technology did not increase in the intended way, and money intended for them instead went to a large expansion in subjects such as sociology, which attracted students not only for their intrinsic interest but also for the ease by which degrees could be obtained in them. Thus the actual direction of the main expansion was dictated not by the requirement for scientists and technologists that the Committee had itself supported, but by the choice of subjects by students who before the Robbins expansion would never have come to universities at all. And neither the Government nor university authorities made any move to correct this unintended change of direction".

"Moreover, since overwhelming priority was given to numbers as opposed to quality, even within the sciences and technologies themselves, standards were lowered in order to meet the quota, and to try to prevent too much of the science and technology share of the cake going elsewhere. And since the UGC has allocated funds overwhelmingly in proportion to the undergraduate teaching load, any department that tried to preserve its standards by not accepting inadequate undergraduate students thereby found its research possibilities restricted. And when the students had graduated and began to be tried in industry, it was found,

not surprisingly, that some of them were not of a quality that industry had been led to expect. The result was that science and engineering graduates from universities began to get an unfairly bad name, and the pendulum has swung against universities in favour, for the time being, of the polytechnics."

"So universities are now under financial duress, and some basic departments are even worse off than before Robbins, because so many staff and ancillaries have been taken on in the softer options. These now demand for their maintenance such a large share of the university grant that there is less left than before Robbins for the basic departments. Verily 'the last state of that man is worse than the first!'"

And we now have redundant teacher-training colleges turn themselves into grotesque Colleges of Higher Education, offering CNAAs degrees not worth the paper they are written on, wasting resources and producing yet more unemployable demi-intellectuals to destabilise our society.

As quality in the state sector declines, quality in the private and foundation sector actually rises, creating a growing gap which naturally spurs the destroyers of educational merit on to destroy what is left of objective examinations and, if possible, to destroy or further constrict the non-state system.

Our aim, by contrast, is the pursuit of excellence. And we must widen choice, which remains an empty catchphrase if it does not include choice between the two sectors - or even more than two. This entails changes in state budgeting systems, and we make modest proposals towards that end. It is appropriate to remind those who allowed the grammar schools to be destroyed, so long as the public schools were given a new lease of life, that they were in error even by their own narrow criteria. For grammar

schools and selective education generally were, in the long term, the only defence of the public school.

But grammar schools were much more the public schools' first line of defence. They were the cornerstone of the whole educational system, providing a high proportion of teachers for all schools and of intakes for university. With their comprehensivisation, and visible decline in quality - unmatched numerically by growth in the independent sector - all schools suffer. Intake to grammar schools and comprehensives, and then to universities, and to the teaching profession, all are endangered by the destruction of the grammar school. So far, this danger to British education has not been recognised officially, let alone preparations made to counter it. How could it be recognised officially, when the educational establishment either initiated or collaborated in the destruction of the grammar school?

IS THE COMPREHENSIVE REVOLUTION DEVOURING ITS CHILDREN?

When the great comprehensivists' drive began, its advocates held up large discrepancies in post-primary performance among different social classes as proof of the existing system's inadequacy. They also held that the inadequacy of the 11+ and other systems of selection allowed great tranches of talent to slip through the net into secondary moderns, where they were "wasted".

Now that the grammar and secondary modern schools have been largely destroyed, leaving the stark choice between state education - "where they send you" - and fee-paying (while financing the state system through taxes nevertheless) the shortcomings of the comprehensives are becoming too blatant for all but a few of the blindest fanatics to deny.

But what are the reactions of the comprehensivists? They blame residual selectivity for "creaming off" the talent, leaving the comprehensives without leaven. Now apart from its questionable morality (after all, Kant's imperative was treat all people as ends, never as means) this assertion diametrically contradicts their initial claim that selectivity is extremely inefficient. For if it is inefficient, how can it "cream off" to such a point that it deprives comprehensives; if it can "cream off", how can it be inefficient?

They now blame the "working class" area and its social characteristics for poor academic performance, deliberately forgetting that they initially held up the poor performance as a defect which justified replacing the existing system by comprehensives.

As the juggernaut drives on, the sixth form is eroded. As predicted by percipient critics of comprehensives, comprehensive sixth forms weaken through lack of numbers, even where teachers are available. A vicious circle sets in. The latest "patch on patch" attempt to circumvent the results of their carnage of the grammar schools is the creation of sixth form colleges.

But like the previous forms of social engineering which brought them into existence, the sixth form colleges, meant to patch an ailing system, themselves begin to exert a corrosive influence on what is left of it.

Many comprehensives had found difficulty in finding sixth form teachers of quality, and even quantity. Contrary to comprehensivist theory, which believed that grammar school (and later public school) teachers would simply transfer en masse, with the school furniture, it became apparent that good grammar school teachers have alternative occupations at home and abroad.

For those who remained, the sixth form was not just part of their duties, it was their culmination and compensation. Take that away and you lose more teachers. But then, who prepares comprehensive children for sixth form entry?

So the rot affects the system from top to bottom, and not least the keystone of the arch, the sixth form.

As we argued at the outset, deterioration did not begin overnight. It has been a long process, and though not fully divorced from parallel changes in the wider society, it is not unconnected with socialism, though the connexion itself is complex. But we must begin the turn round now. The longer we put off difficult decisions, the harder they become.

And again in the words of R V Jones, we must remember that "Government control of education is dangerous in at least two respects. A doctrinaire policy such as that regarding comprehensive schools can be enforced before its merits have been proved - or worse, before its faults have become evident, and long-term damage thereby inflicted. Alternatively, something that ought to be done is forbidden because its importance has not yet been recognised by official doctrine, however prestigiously this may have been developed, just as the merits of the convoy system were not recognised by the Admiralty in 1917. And the larger and more monolithic an organisation, the greater this danger becomes. Those at the top of the administrative hierarchy become increasingly isolated from what is happening in the front line, and they tend to listen selectively to those opinions from lower down which best fit the doctrine that they have been promulgating. Finally, State command of education has the ultimate and sinister danger where the thoughts of the coming generation can be moulded in 1984 fashion, and where purges of the Nazi and Stalinist type can get rid of any teacher who does not conform to the party line."

One fact is clear from past experience: neither a completely conformist nor a completely independent system represents the optimum, which must lie in some combination of a degree of conformity with a degree of independence. The balance between the two must change from time to time, and it is an unfortunate fact that with the increasing organisation that an interdependent society necessitates, the balance tends to increasing conformity. But so great, and indeed essential, have been the contributions of individual initiative in the past that we must do everything to make it possible to help such initiative to flourish".

A START MUST BE MADE, NOW -

We have no patience with those who argue that decline and socialism are inevitable, that all we can do is soften the contours of descent, that politics is the art of the possible, that the clock cannot be turned back. Man is master of his fate. We Tories are romantics. We are heirs of a party which set the impossible as its goal, and succeeded. It is not a matter of turning the clock back. The clock has stopped. We must get it started again. That is the purpose of this paper.

For all these reasons, because we have so much that is flawed in theory as well as bad in practice, weak in structure and poor in performance, irrelevant in some cases, deliberately anti-educational and anti-values in others, the results of decades of socialist-led drift in some cases, of pusillanimity and me-too-ism in others, any overview designed to serve as the Party's educational stance during the run-up to the next election would need to start everywhere at once.

We cannot always attack state hypertrophy head-on, given the vested interests it has built up and the alternatives it has weakened or destroyed. We must circumvent in some

cases, re-orient in others, provide non-state alternatives in yet others. But if we fail to prune back the state now, in this generation, it will over-run and destroy us.

It must be stressed again: the time and public comprehension to start building steadily from basic philosophy upwards is lacking. We shall therefore have to tackle philosophy, medium-term plans and present abuses simultaneously. That is what this document endeavours to do.

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2. POLICY PROPOSALS

PREAMBLE

Post-war educational policies have been increasingly dominated by the socialist principle of compulsory equality. One type of school for all, no selection either within or between schools, the abolition of examinations which pupils can fail - these are the directions in which our educational system has been moving.

It is time to call a halt and reverse these trends before standards of attainment and behaviour are irretrievably sacrificed.

We need to replace socialist, totalitarian uniformity by Conservative diversity and freedom of choice, Socialist central control by Conservative encouragement for individual initiative and responsibility, and Socialist secrecy by Conservative openness and accountability.

Above all, we need to make our education system proof against the irreversible structural changes now intended by the Labour Party which is now committed to the abolition of independent schools (Labour Party Discussion Document "Private Schools" in the Socialism for the Eighties Series), with compulsory enforcement of mixed-ability teaching and the destruction of religious and single-sex schools. (London Labour Party Manifesto, GLC Elections, 1981)*.

CONSERVATIVE PRINCIPLES AND PROPOSALS

The major purpose of education is to provide all our future citizens with reasonable access to worthwhile skills and bodies of knowledge, including knowledge of the culture and traditions of our free and democratic society.

*The manifesto in question also proposes to recognise the Trotskyite National Union of School Students, and to provide public funds to support its activities.

To achieve this purpose we need to:

- (a) maintain, improve and monitor educational standards of all kinds - standards of behaviour and morality, no less than standards of educational attainment;
- (b) encourage more freedom of choice for parents, more individual responsibility and more accountability of schools to parents;
- (c) increase choice which implies more diversity of provision and more information about that provision;
- (d) stimulate a greater awareness of costs, including opportunity costs, and of the need for better value for money in our massive national investment in education which is higher now in real terms than ever before. These principles and some related policies are also discussed in the accompanying background papers A Dash of Ginger and Accountability and the Purposes of Education.

POLICY PROPOSALS

These are outlined for schools, and for higher and further education: a range of policies is suggested under each heading all of which are compatible with the principles set out above.

A SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

We recognise that there is more to education than examinations, but examinations are important as indicators of educational attainment for pupils, parents, teachers, employers and the public.

1. Public Examinations A range of examinations is needed in order to cater for the diverse needs of children with differing aptitudes and interests.

16+ Examinations

- (a) The proposed merger of GCE Ordinary Level and CSE should be carefully monitored. It is vital that the control of syllabuses and examinations for the top three grades (equivalent to grades A - C at O-level) should remain with the GCE examination boards. Mode III examinations, in which teachers assess their own pupils, should be strongly discouraged; the principle of external assessment is vital to maintenance of standards in all public examinations.
- (b) A new national public school-leaving examination in basic attainment should be established for those pupils - about 40% of the total number - for whom CSE examinations are too difficult. If they pass this examination, pupils could be permitted to leave school before the age of 16, provided they have a job.

18+ Examinations

The commitment to retain A-level examinations should be publicly renewed, particularly in the light of the recent speculation by the Chairman of the Schools Council that public examinations may be replaced by pupil profiles.

Year-on-Year Comparisons

All public examination boards should be instructed to construct their examinations so as to maintain, as far as possible, uniform standards from year to year. If this is done, it should be possible to make valid comparisons about standards over time.

2. Parental Choice Measures should be taken to increase parental choice of schools and to facilitate children and young people changing schools if they and their parents wish. Parental choice should be the primary factor in determining which school a child attends.

- (a) The choice and appeals provision of the 1980 Act should be widely publicised.
- (b) Flexible transfer arrangements should be encouraged to enable pupils to change schools. In principle, such transfers should be possible at any age but transfer arrangements at 13 and 16 (as well as 11) should be particularly facilitated.
- (c) More information about individual schools, including details of public examination results - should be freely available to parents. Such information should also be available to the public so that debates on educational policy may be better informed.
- (d) A greater variety of types of school should be encouraged. These could include schools which specialise in particular subject areas such as those which already exist for music and drama. Such schools could specialise, for example, in Mathematics, Computing, Sciences, Languages, Arts subjects, technical subjects - and even in Physical Education. They could be encouraged to become centres of excellence within the state system. If a school is over-subscribed, then some form of selection may be necessary; this should be done by the school using already defined criteria which may include selection by aptitude and ability.
- (e) We are strongly in favour of a major change in the financing of school education by the introduction of educational allowances. Like family allowances, these would be given to parents who could "spend" them in schools of their choice, either in the state or the independent sector. Such a change would give parents much more power and influence and would help to make schools more responsive to what parents want for their

children and more adaptive to the changing needs of society.

There are various ways in which such a scheme could be introduced. Three possibilities are:

- (i) All the schools in an area could be financed by allowances - if the LEA so decided. This may be unsatisfactory since some people in these areas may not want to participate in such a scheme.
- (ii) Voluntary educational allowances could be introduced which would be available to all parents who wanted them. LEA schools could opt to be financed by educational allowances rather than by their LEA.
- (iii) All state schools could be financed through allowances either completely or in part. Different types of funding would be necessary. Some schools could be completely financed by allowances. Other schools - such as special schools or schools in educational priority areas - could be partly financed by allowances and partly by LEAS's*.

Whichever possibility was adopted, the likely result is that many schools - possibly the majority, if (iii) is chosen - would become self-governing. This would give much greater autonomy to governing bodies, heads and teachers with the provision that they satisfied parents and the inspectorate.

The role of local authorities education committees would change to that of developing their community service role. With most schools becoming self-governing, local education committees would be able to concentrate much better on services which fall more into the realm of public rather than private goods.

*It is important that wherever educational allowances are introduced they should primarily be seen as replacing rather than supplementing recurrent finance through LEA's. Special arrangements would need to be devised to cover capital expenditure.

Introducing educational allowances would have one other very important advantage - it would help to bridge the present gulf between state and independent schools and so help to mitigate the problems of the present situation where we have Two Nations in education. If an experimental scheme were to be tried, we could arrange for it to be monitored, with the help of experienced economists who have expressed an interest in education voucher schemes.

B PROVISION FOR THE 16 - 19 AGE GROUP

We support the Macfarlane Report when it suggests that no one type of provision should be imposed either by central government or by local authorities.

We should retain schools which have good sixth forms that are working well. There is no reason why such schools should not co-exist with sixth form colleges and further education colleges, particularly in urban areas.

It is just not true that falling rolls will force A-level provision to be rationalised. The proportion of the population in this age group in social classes 1, 2 and 3a (which provide most A-level candidates) is not dropping by anything like as much as the total population.

C HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

Student Maintenance

We propose that the present mandatory grant system should be replaced by student loans. This would test student motivation, make it more likely that students would choose vocational courses and, by ending the parental means test, both remove an unfair anomaly and treat students as responsible adults. Provided that the scheme allowed for low earners (including women with young children) to defer or be exonerated from payments, it could be a much fairer system than the present grant scheme.

Its attractiveness would be enhanced, when funds permit, by:

- (a) the reintroduction of state scholarships, with possibly more scholarships being made available in subjects relevant to national needs like science and engineering;
- (b) the extension of a loans scheme to students at present covered by discretionary grants and also to students on part-time or postgraduate courses. This would widen access to education in a way which would require students to demonstrate their own commitment.

Fees

A much greater proportion of the current income of universities and colleges should be derived from fees. This would make all those involved in higher and further education much more aware of costs and would also increase accountability.

Capital and Research Costs

Publicly funded research and capital costs in universities should remain the province of the UGC. A central body, similar to the UGC, should be established to control developments in degree-level work outside the universities. These bodies should undertake a review of the whole of the higher education system - universities, polytechnics and other colleges - with the aim of reversing some of the over-expansion of the 1960's. They should seriously consider whether the country really needs the present number of institutions of higher education. For example, should not 1 or 2 universities be closed? Do we really need 8 polytechnics in the London area?

The closure of whole institutions would be much better than across the board reduction in funding. It would show that

the government was serious in its intentions and would encourage the remaining institutions to adapt more readily to changing circumstances.*

In addition it will be necessary to reduce the numbers of academic staff if significant cost savings are to be made, since salaries form the major part of total costs involved. This will not be easy as it will involve a long overdue review of the concept and use of academic tenure. However, this issue should not be shirked and it may well be desirable to aim to reduce staff rather more than is absolutely necessary so as to leave some scope for new developments.

Capital costs for courses in other colleges should remain under local authority control.

Open Tech.

We support, in principle, the idea of an Open Tech, provided that care is taken to avoid some of the mistakes of the Open University. In particular:

- (a) the courses should be fully tested on a pilot scheme before being made available to large numbers of students;
- (b) great care must be taken to see that appropriate practical facilities are available to students;
- (c) courses vulnerable to extreme ideological bias should be scrutinised carefully before publication and if bias is found, they should not be published at public expense. Such bias exists in many current Open University and Science and Society courses. Open Tech courses would be seen by many on the left - as they saw the Open University in 1970 - as a golden opportunity to politicise a whole new generation of students. It is

*When considering which institutions should be closed, one factor should be taken into account in addition to student numbers and the quality of research and teaching. The government should ask how well the staff of the institution responded when, in recent years, academic freedom and freedom of speech for visiting speakers have been threatened by student and staff disruptions.

much better to act before such courses are published than to publicise their iniquities afterwards.

Despite all the adverse publicity about the ideological bias of some of its courses, the Open University has not withdrawn or significantly modified any of them.

Overseas Students Fees

We think that more consideration should be given to marginal costs rather than average costs per student in assessing economic fees for overseas students. It might make more sense for each institution to set its own fees in the light of its own financial situation. However, for this to be possible, it will be necessary for all those involved to be much more aware of costs than they are at present.

D COSTS

The budget for education is now around £8 billion and has increased by 300% in real terms over the last 30 years. One major question, which everybody in education should be asking, is "Is the country getting good educational value for all this money?" We do not believe it is, and we believe that the way to ensure better use of resources is to decentralise financial decision making so that those responsible for running our individual schools, colleges and universities take full financial responsibility for the running of their institutions. This would be salutary whether the annual recurrent cost is £80,000 for an average primary school, half a £1 million for a secondary school or £10 million or more for a polytechnic or university.

Individual institutions ought to compete for pupils or students and become more directly aware of the financial implications of their decisions. Then there would be direct incentives to spend more money on teaching and learning - the primary purposes of education - and less on the educational bureaucracies of the DES and the