

Britain: Labour's plan for licences another attempt to vilify teachers

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23 January 2014

In another bid to outdo the Tories in attacking the working class, Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt recently announced that under a Labour government, teachers working in England's state schools would have to be licensed every few years.

This would involve both continual assessments of a teacher's competence, as well as an external assessor making their judgement on whether a teacher is fit to teach. Originally proposed by the previous Labour government's Education Secretary Ed Balls on a five-year cycle, Labour intends to consult with the teaching trade unions in order to implement teacher licensing.

According to Hunt, the latest proposal is intended to give teachers the "same professional standing" as doctors and lawyers, "which means re-licensing themselves which means continued professional development". He continued, "If you're not a motivated teacher... passionate about being in the classroom—you shouldn't really be in this profession. So if you're not willing to engage in re-licensing to update your skills then you really shouldn't be in the classroom."

Labour proposes that teacher licences will be issued and administered by a Royal College of Teaching, replacing the now defunct General Teaching Council.

Whenever politicians of all the main parties start talking about professional development and raising the status of teachers, beware! Performance pay, linked to exam results, was smuggled in with the collaboration of the teaching unions, under the guise of supposedly encouraging professional development.

This year, teachers in England have each been set end-of-year test result targets, on the fulfilment of which their annual pay increment depends. If teachers do not agree to these almost impossible targets, it will be a black mark against them. In government-speak, their

expectations for their pupils are too low.

As far as quality in-service training for teachers is concerned, that was laid to rest when the previous Labour government, from 1997, began to privatise the education services that local government authorities used to administer. Previously, each local authority employed a team of specialist subject advisors, and teachers were able to elect to go on quality courses to pursue their own particular interests and improve their expertise.

Today, teachers' courses very much depend on what schools can afford, and their content is not pedagogy, but driven by fulfillment of the latest government/Ofsted (school inspectors) initiatives.

The proposal to licence teachers implies that there exist in state schools shirkers and incompetents, who do not deserve annual pay rises for experience, let alone a job. As Hunt said, regular re-licensing would allow those deemed the worst teachers to be sacked.

This witch-hunting of teachers is being used as part of the justification for the next round of public sector cuts, to the tune of £25 billion, announced in the New Year by Chancellor George Osborne.

The right-wing think tank Policy Exchange said it endorsed Labour's teacher licensing proposals on the condition they were linked to performance-related pay. Under the headline, "Labour will tell teachers to improve or face sack", the *Times* noted that "Teaching unions gave a guarded welcome" to the plans.

In an interview on the BBC's Radio 4 *This Morning* programme, National Union of Teachers (NUT) leader Christine Blower made a show of opposing the licensing of teachers, as she listed how extensive the assessment and observation of teaching already is—with Ofsted inspections, and now Performance Management. She omitted saying that the NUT devised a model

Performance Management/Pay document sent into schools to help them implement performance pay for teachers.

NUT Deputy General Secretary Kevin Courtney made clear the willingness of the union to fall into line when he said, “If re-licensing were truly based on a new entitlement to high quality professional development that was controlled by the teaching profession then we could talk about the details of how to improve it. ... It could be very positive for education.”

As part of the Socialist Teachers Alliance set up by the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party, Courtney has been promoted as a “left” to try and give some credibility to the unions.

The NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers) adopted the same two-faced stance, with its leader Chris Keates declaring that “important preconditions” had to be met before the move could be introduced. “If it’s a licence that’s going to apply not just to state schools but right across the independent sector”, she told the BBC, “then I think there is a positive basis for us to have a discussion with Labour.”

Association of Teacher and Lecturers General Secretary Mary Bousted said, “If there is going to be a requirement to have teachers with licences to update or revalidate, we also need to balance that with an assurance that teachers will get good quality professional training and development.”

Alongside his teacher license proposals, Hunt also said that every school in England and Wales would have a teacher dedicated to maintaining order. In an article in Rupert Murdoch’s *The Sun*, Hunt stated that “the very least we can expect as parents is that teachers have had training in teaching and how to control a class? [sic] No child can concentrate amidst chaos. And no teacher should have to fear for their safety. So Labour would put improved behaviour at the heart of all teacher training. We would train up a new generation of behaviour experts to boost classroom discipline.”

Blaming pupils in order to conceal the disastrous impact of the privatisation policies in education by successive governments, *The Sun* editorialised that some students “wreck their own educations and those of their classmates.”

The editorial concluded, “Hunt’s solution, which also

includes better training for wannabe teachers in disciplining troublemakers, is a smart election policy.”



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