



## **Report of the General Secretary – Congress 8 May 2015**

### **Good afternoon Acting President and Congress**

It is an honour and a privilege to be standing here and addressing you for the first time. In the short number of months of have been here in Scotland I have watched, listened, and hopefully learnt a great deal about the Scottish Education system.

What I have learnt is the important role the SSTA has in the future of Scottish Education.

As you may have noticed that other election is now over but the 'Real' election now begins.

The Scottish Government election in 2016 is the 'real' election in terms of shaping the future of Education in Scotland. Our Association must be part of that future and must be prepared to engage and convince all those who care about education of the future shape of Education in Scotland.

We in Scotland have a very good education system (and I can say that without fear of contradiction having worked in recent times in Northern Ireland and England).

However, we need to work to maintain and develop our system. Northern Ireland is also in a good place but I am sad to say that education in England is in a sorry state. I am also sad to say that it is unlikely to improve in the very near future. It goes without saying, if you want to see what can happen if you get complacent, unions take their 'eye off the ball' and government is allowed to seek change for change's sake then look no further than south of the border.

In England they have an education system that

- Gives an advantage to those who can afford to pay
- Educational Underachievement is not a priority
- No National Curriculum
- A narrow and restrictive curriculum that only suits the more academically able
- An examination system that creates failure for most
- An unqualified teacher workforce with low levels of pay for all
- No GTC to protect qualified teacher status
- Local Authorities that have a responsibility for education but who do not have the powers to control schools.
- A public education system starved of money

- More than 400 private supply teacher agencies who charge schools more than £200 a day and where some teachers only receive £50 for a day's work
- Schools and educational services that have been outsourced to private companies that only exist for profit
- A Teaching Profession that has seen its national pay and conditions washed away. Where teachers do not receive the annual pay rise unless they are prepared to jump through increasingly higher hoops.
- And a teacher workforce that is demoralised by government, the Inspection service, competition between schools, Headteacher bully and ever increasing accountability and workload.

If England wishes to improve its education system it needs not look any further but north of the border.

The Scottish education system must be defended but it must be prepared to adapt and change and the SSTA needs to part of that change.

There are still areas of the education system in Scotland that need to be addressed. SSTA needs to have a clear vision and a commitment to address these areas. The future government of Scotland needs to see teachers as part of the solution, and not part of the problem. The teacher in the classroom needs to be listened to and trusted to deliver the education system of the future.

### **Child Poverty**

We need to be prepared to tackle Child Poverty and educational underachievement. Every child needs to see education as the way forward and teachers need to lead and be given the support in meeting the needs of their young people in their schools.

The announcement of a £100m over 4 years in Early years is welcome. But as we said to the Cabinet Secretary back in February there are pupils in Secondary Schools now who need help. Government must be committed to provide funds to meet the need of these young people to meet their full potential. Further cuts in ASN and those remaining ASN teachers being deployed to cover teacher vacancies will not help these young people.

It is necessary that all groups of young people that have barriers to accessing education are identified and supported through the education system. I am particularly proud that the SSTA has identified 'young carers' as a group of young people in need of support. Not only is there a motion here today but also at the Scottish Trade Union Congress that gained unanimous support.

### **Curriculum**

We need a wide vision of learning and achievement and the Curriculum for Excellence is moving us in the right direction but it needs to be broad, balanced, flexible and inclusive. It needs to meet the aspirations of all our young people.

The governments programme of 'Developing the Workforce' is part of this process and it will impact on schools and the work of teachers. Unfortunately, the cuts in education and the shortage of teachers have and will continue to create a narrowing of the curriculum. This will lead to some of our young people disengaging with education as a consequence and the problems that will create.

### **Qualifications**

The successful introduction of the new qualifications was only achieved by the commitment and determination of teachers such as SSTA members in schools. SSTA members have always want to do the best for the young people in their classes and went over and beyond to ensure they didn't lose out. It would be wrong of government to rely upon this commitment in any of its future initiatives. The Government must be prepared to listen and work with teachers and in particular the SSTA in all its future plans.

However, I do have concerns about National 4. If we have qualification they must of value but we have heard of undue pressure being applied in some schools to achieve National 4 for all young people in their classes. Should the system demand all student reach National 4 then the qualification and all the effort would be to no avail. The qualifications need to fit the teaching and learning and not the other way round. Teacher's professional judgement must be respected and not tested at every opportunity.

The recent drop in Literacy figures could have been envisaged with everything else that teachers are expected to do in the past few years. However, the government needs to be pragmatic, realistic in its analysis be prepared to prioritise its objectives in the coming years.

### **Qualified Teachers**

All children need Qualified Teachers and I reinforce the commitment of the GTCS to ensure only recognised qualified teachers teach in schools in Scotland.

But the government must ensure that teachers have regular and meaningful and continuing entitlement to professional development. This must not be only to meet the needs of the schools, but the development of subject area but more importantly the teacher's professional and long term career development. The funds for professional development must be protected for all teachers at all levels, including supply teachers, if we want to deliver a professional and adaptable teaching workforce for the 21st Century.

### **Local Authorities**

There is a need for a sustainable education system to support schools with local authorities entrusted and responsible for schools. I fear that the recent decision by 4 local authorities to leave COSLA could open the door to outside agencies or trusts being given responsibility for schools. These bodies would not be under local democratic authority control and could threaten the whole education system in

Scotland. I urge the four authorities not to play politics with education and return to COSLA and maintain a national education system with national pay and conditions. If they believe COSLA is not working properly then reform it from within instead of trying to score political points from the side lines. We also need to consider the future should the current system fail to work for teachers and possible reorganisation with central education authority local administered for Scotland.

Added to this the new Education Bill will establish the role of Chief Education Officer in every local authority accountable for closing the attainment gap.

Could this development put more pressure on an already stretched school system or could it be centralising of education.

### **Invest in Education**

Government says Education is the centre of government policy but education needs increased funding to end the downward spiral of education funding. It must expand the school building programme to allow the best facilities for our teachers and young people in an attempt to meet the future needs of the country.

We also need to reinforce the fundamental principle of Education being a public service and not to be run for private companies to make a profit. We need to resist the further privatisation of education as has happened in other parts of the UK. We need to resist the introduction of private supply agencies to meet the teacher shortage problem and any other attempts to outsource educational services.

### **Teaching Profession**

We need to make teaching an attractive profession to encourage the retention of the high quality teachers we have and recruit the highest quality people in to the profession. Unfortunately, the damage over the last few years needs to be undone and a number of areas still need to be addressed to deliver a high quality profession.

**Pensions** - The possibility of teachers retiring at the age of 68 will not retain or attract teachers. This added to the new increasing tax on pensions by increased contributions. That only leads teachers to work longer and receive less benefit through their pension will not retain or recruit teachers.

Maintaining a **National Pay and Conditions** structure is threatened by the local authorities leaving COSLA. But COSLA and the government needs to address the cuts in teacher's pay over the last few years and needs to show a commitment and reward teachers for the work already done and the challenges ahead. This must mean a substantial increase in pay in the coming years to retain and attract teachers.

**Supply Teachers-** The SSTA has always recognised that Supply Teachers are an important and essential part of the education service. Schools are unable to function without this experienced and professional group of teachers. Therefore, to retain and recruit supply teachers SSTA seeks

- a restoration of supply teacher pay levels,
- a national coordinated register of qualified supply teachers that are GTCS registered
- a single police check for all supply teachers
- an entitlement to Continuing Professional Development.

**Workload** – teachers need more time for teaching – not more tests

However, the recent joint report by government, employers and teacher unions can potentially open the door for teacher’s professionalism to be restored and tackle teacher workload.

**The Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy Follow-up Report published in March 2015**

gives guidance to schools on

Assessment should be based on professional judgement. Tracking pupil progress and moderation is important; however there is no need for large folios of evidence to support it.

**Forward Planning** should be proportionate; there is NO need to plan, assess, record or report every experience and outcome. Planning should support professional dialogue rather than to fulfil an audit function

**Monitoring and Reporting** –ICT planning and reporting systems should be used with CAUTION. Just because such systems can support very detailed planning and reporting, does not mean they should be used in that way.

d) **Self Evaluation and Planning** – over-reliance on audit “tick box” distracts from quality teaching and learning.

Teachers need to be allowed to focus on teaching and learning and any activity that distracts from that must be severely questioned. Therefore, we need to use this document to support the professional judgement of the teacher and cut the relentless administration.

**As I said earlier**

**you may have noticed that the other election is now over but the ‘Real’ election now begins. That discussion is real and happening now.**

**The SSTA will be there and making the voice of secondary teachers heard.**