

A photograph of four children running in a grassy field during sunset. The children are in motion, with their hair and clothes slightly blurred. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a sense of joy and energy. The children are of diverse ethnicities and are running together, holding hands in some places.

GROWING UP IN THE 2020s

Preparing children for the changes and challenges ahead

*With a foreword by Angela Rayner MP and contributions
from Tracy Brabin MP, Liam Byrne MP, Chris Keates and more*

NASUWT

The Teachers' Union

NASUWT, The Teachers' Union, represents teachers and headteachers in all sectors from early years to further education. The NASUWT has approximately 285,000 members from across the UK.

By 'putting teachers first', the NASUWT works to enhance the status of the teaching profession to deliver real improvements to teachers' working lives, seeking to ensure they are recognised and rewarded as highly skilled professionals with working conditions that enable them to focus on their core role of teaching.

GROWING UP IN THE 2020s

Preparing children for the changes and challenges ahead

This report asks how children's lives are changing and how politics should respond to make sure that young people in the next decade have good childhoods and are ready to lead fulfilling, productive adult lives. The contributors examine how we can prepare children for a future different from today that we cannot and should not try to predict. They consider technology, creativity, enterprise and the early years – and how to tackle inequalities of class and geography.

Together the chapters show that our public and civic institutions need fundamental change if they are to successfully support young people over the next 10 years and beyond. From cradle to the workplace, young people need better services, more geared to the lives they will lead in the future. And nowhere could that be more true than in schools, where we need to radically rethink how and what we teach.

Growing Up in the 2020s is the end-point of a project that also included a series of five Westminster roundtables with politicians and experts. We are indebted to all those who contributed at those events as well as the authors who feature here. Through both phases of the project we were delighted to work with NASUWT, who had the imagination to want to look beyond classroom conditions and think deeply about the future of childhood.

Andrew Harrop and Vanesha Singh

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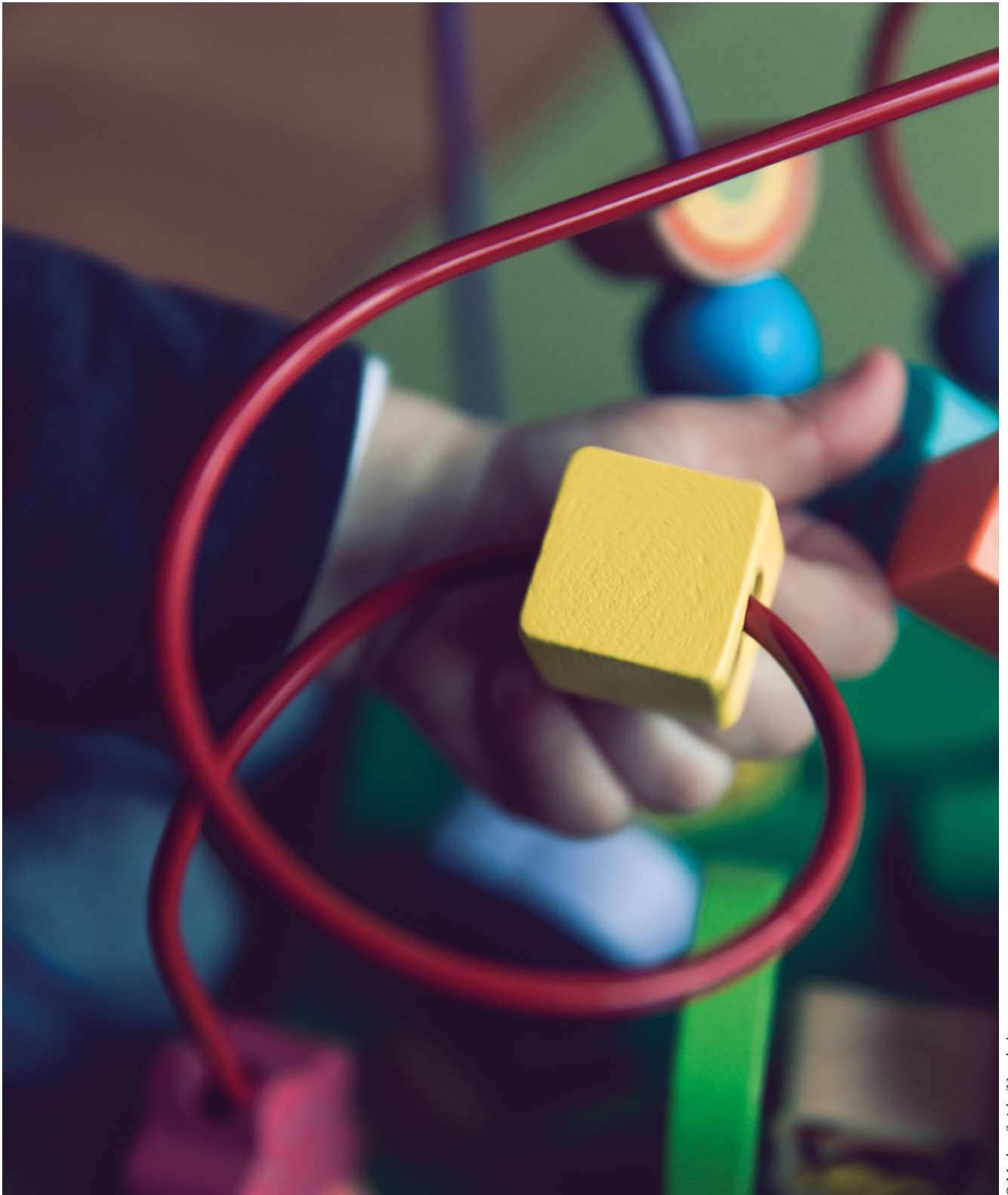


A Fabian Society report
Edited by Andrew Harrop
and Vanesha Singh

Like all publications of the Fabian Society, this report represents not the collective views of the Society, but only the views of the individual writers. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the labour movement.

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Introduction: repairing the damage

Labour will create a new national institution that can break the cycle of poverty and give all children the future they deserve, writes *Angela Rayner*



Angela Rayner is the Labour MP for Ashton-under-Lyne and the shadow secretary of state for education

THE POLITICAL CHOICES that shape our childhoods are among those with the greatest power to change our lives. I don't write that just as a politician but as someone whose own life was transformed by those very choices.

I've been open about my life: child poverty is more than just an abstract problem to me. On the council estate where I was raised I was one of the poorest and my mum struggled to look after us. I'd pester my friends to let me round for tea on a Sunday. School was first and foremost a place where I could get a free meal and out of my parents' hair.

Then, aged 16, I fell pregnant with my own first child. It would have been easy to think that the direction of my life, and that of my young son, was already set. After all, my mum had a difficult life, and so did I, and it would have been easy to assume that my son would simply face the same.

And that could easily have happened. I remember feeling like a failure going to friends and family for help with raising my child, worried that I wouldn't be a good mother.

But while I was born at a time when social progress was thrown into reverse by the Thatcher government, by the time I was a young mother there were Labour policies like Sure Start, which broke the cycle of poverty I was in.

The choices made under that Labour government helped to transform my life, and the life of my young son. It was the support I received from Sure Start – then a brand new initiative by the recently-elected Labour government – which broke that cycle. I learnt things about parenting that might have seemed obvious but weren't – even as simple as telling, and showing, your children how much you love them.

Those early interventions meant that my children – and now my grandchildren – will have a very different childhood to mine, and that will change their lives as well. But if I hadn't been able to access that Sure Start centre, we would never have had the help we needed during my son's childhood.

The tragedy is that another generation of children are growing up now at a time when governments have made different choices about how they are supported through their own childhoods. When we heard earlier this year about school children filling their pockets with food to take home, or that a thousand of those Sure Start centres have now been lost thanks to austerity, we see the consequences of those choices.

It will be the priority of the next Labour government to repair that damage – to build a future where the next generation of children do not experience what I and too many

others did in generations past. So I am delighted to welcome this Fabian Society report, which examines the future of childhood and asks what it will take for young people to grow up well in the decade ahead.

Our greatest achievement in government, the National Health Service, has thrived for over 60 years. Free at the point of delivery, funded by progressive taxation, and serving everyone from cradle to grave, it stands as a symbol of our values of fairness and justice, as well as an institution that continues to change – and save – lives, far beyond those of the Labour politicians who created it. I want the next Labour government to create something similar in education: the National Education Service.

Reading the essays in this report, I know that we won't be alone in that endeavour. The contributors are outraged by the injustices our young people face; but they are all even more passionate about creating a society where every child is loved and valued.

In the last eight years, the achievements of past Labour governments have faced relentless attack but services like the National Health Service still support the British people, as the British people still support them. The next Labour government has the chance to create, nurture and grow an institution which, like the NHS, stands the test of time and supports generations to come. ■

Childhoods for making futures

We cannot determine how future generations will live, but it is our job to ensure they thrive in worlds different from our own, writes *Keri Facer*



Keri Facer is professor of educational and social futures at the University of Bristol

THE CHILDREN OF the 2020s will grow up to face a very different world from the one we live in now. They may face questions such as: how do you live and work in a society where over half the population are aged over 65? What capabilities can you bring to work alongside intelligent algorithms? How can we adapt the way we work and live to enable a shift to radically low carbon societies? The 2020s will be the foundation and platform for adulthood in the 2040s, 50s, 60s in which these, and other questions that we cannot foresee, will become live and challenging.

Under these circumstances, there is a tendency to revert to HG Wells' aphorism that "civilisation is a race between education and catastrophe" and to begin to envisage how we can defend our current way of life against perceived threats; or alternatively, to imagine how education can usher in a shiny new future of robots, basic income and infinite leisure.

Both of these responses would be a mistake. Firstly, it is an ethical misjudgment to think that our job is to imagine a particular future towards which we need to march our young people through the educational process, merrily building up 'human capital' as they go. We do not have the right to determine how future generations will live in worlds different from our own. Secondly, it is a practical mistake. Given the radical

unpredictability of the moment any attempt to envisage a particular future for which education should prepare is likely to be wrong. By choosing one vision we assume will come about, we risk over-engineering a population in a particular direction and eradicating the knowledge, skills and talents that may be needed in different conditions. Diversity is strength in unpredictable times.

Instead, then, it is our job as educators, policymakers and parents to ensure young people experience the sorts of childhoods that will enable them to both imagine better futures for themselves and to develop the confidence and knowledge that will allow them to create a good collective life under unpredictable conditions.

What sorts of childhoods in the 2020s would build this sort of foundation? Firstly, for an unknown future, childhood needs to enable young people to develop a strong personal project: a sense of who they are and of what they can offer to society; what they see as their obligations and responsibilities and what they in turn value from others. In times of significant change, we know that people are pulled from pillar to post, developing what Margaret Archer calls 'fractured reflexivity', a lack of a core sense of identity and purpose to hold you in place. What is needed, then, will be a childhood that helps children to explore and understand who they, uniquely in the world, are able to be-

come and what they are able to make and contribute even in changing conditions.

Secondly, young people will need to be supported to develop friendships and communities. There is no point in developing a personal project in isolation – we are fundamentally dependent on others, enmeshed in networks and relationships that we cannot enumerate. Thinking of ourselves as autonomous individuals, deracinated from people and planet, is no longer viable (if it ever was). A childhood that is founded on the experience of living in communities, embedded in an awareness of their foundation on a living planet, is essential.

Third, young people need to be supported to imagine and invent their own futures through:

- Attention to the present – being supported to notice and engage with what is happening now, what its potential might be and make connections.
- Stewardship – developing the capacity to reflect upon what to value, protect, nurture and care for into the unknown future.
- Reflexivity – the ability to question and challenge ideas of the future that others are presenting to them as well as the ability to challenge their own inbuilt biases and assumptions.

- World-making – the capacity to imagine and explore various possible futures, to generate novel ideas and to examine how different developments might play out to create different conditions.
- Experimentation – the capacity to try things out, adapt and learn from mistakes, to build alliances and coalitions, to harness materials and resources, to invent new realities and reflect upon them as they emerge.

What does this mean for education policy in the 2020s?

It means that schools need to focus on the development of the whole person and their capacity to build relationships with others. Centrally and urgently, we need schools that do no harm to mental health (not something that we can currently say with any confidence).

It means that schools must teach the full range of subjects – not just Maths, English and Science, but also the arts, history, geography and languages. Developing the capacity to steward, reflect, invent and experiment requires a broad curriculum. Each of these subjects offers op-

portunities to pay attention, to imagine and to make.

It also means creating the opportunity for young people to act in and on the world, to try things out. This means building confidence in teachers and giving them the freedom to support young people to take risks. It means seeing subjects as living bodies of knowledge that can be shaped and developed through learning. It means seeing young people as members of a public who can work together to address the problems of living in common in changing conditions.

What is needed, then, will be a childhood that helps children to explore and understand who they are

It means starting from the assumption that the future is unknown, not just for society but for each child, and that the job of education is to enable new possibilities to emerge in interaction between the child and

society. This is not a question of identifying a likely future and ensuring each child maximises his or her resources to their advantage in this environment. Instead, it means creating conditions in which the young person can come to know themselves, others and the world and explore the ways in which new and better ways of living together might be created.

This means getting rid of the banal tyranny of predictions that ignorantly presume a desired linear trajectory for each child or an inevitable future for each society. Instead, the quality of education needs to be judged by its capacity to create as rich and diverse a set of encounters with different forms of knowledge and different people as possible for all children, and to attentively monitor and nurture the new possibilities and realities that are opening up for each child as a result.

Rather than a childhood governed by metrics and predictions and by charting of advancement against a narrow idea of linear progression, this means a childhood that is characterised by a deep commitment of all those around the child to enable them to build communities of encounter that allow them to grow in, through and with the world. ■



Early start

Recent steps to support children in their early years have been too slow and too small. A Labour government will not shy away from the mighty task in front of us, says *Tracy Brabin*



Tracy Brabin is the Labour MP for Batley and Spen and shadow minister for early years

IT IS SO encouraging to see the Fabians looking seriously at the future and facing up to the possibilities, as well as the challenges that the 2020s could bring.

The world is changing and fast. Think of how often you see young children playing games or watching videos on tablets or smartphones, and it's easy to forget how comparatively recently we had to leave the house to make a phone call or visit a neighbour to watch TV.

The children of the 2010s are the first to have grown up with smart technology in their hands. This proliferation of touch-screen technology is all the more remarkable when we consider that the first iPad didn't even roll off the production line until 2010. Therefore, predicting what big developments could emerge this year, never mind in the next decade is an impossible task.

What we do know is that there's no turning back the clock. Every generation is going to be more at one with technology than its predecessor.

There are children who get to grips with basic programming by the age of 10 in a way that their grandparents never will. In fact, when accessing digital content, I feel too often how my gran must have felt trying to operate the video player.

This is to highlight that in many ways we don't know what the future will hold but I believe that we have a duty to children

to make sure they are ready for it. Digital expertise will be the great divide between youngsters who have the skills they need and those who don't.

As you would expect, I would hope that children who are born or are growing up in the 2020s do so under a Labour government.

A Labour government would end the austerity agenda that has dominated the 2010s, giving us the chance to improve health and education, while ensuring poverty falls.

And in early education, we have big plans. We will implement an ambitious early years policy overhaul that aims to improve life chances for children of future generations.

The brain of a child develops rapidly in the first few years of life. At birth, a child's brain is roughly 25 per cent formed, by the age of three that has progressed to 80 per cent. We know that if children arrive at their first day of school significantly less developed than their peers, they may never catch up. Research has shown that this attainment gap, and its impact on social mobility, is one that the country cannot afford to ignore.

Save the Children has warned that the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers can be as large as 15 months by the time the children start school. Meanwhile, a report from Teach First showed that the biggest indicator in a child's GCSE

achievements is the progress that a child has made by the age of five. So, there is a mighty task in front of us. It is a problem that no single government has managed to resolve. Despite some worthy attempts, policy initiatives thus far have either been too slow or too small. But this isn't something we're going to shy away from.

Instead, we're going to invest heavily in providing 30 free hours of childcare for children aged between two and four years old.

You may be thinking that this is something the Conservative government has already introduced. Well, although ministers try to boast of a success, there are fundamental differences between what the Tories are offering and what we will deliver.

The first is that under the Conservatives, 30 hours of free childcare are restricted to three and four-year-olds. And even then, it is only available to the children of parents who work at least 16 hours per week and earn up to a maximum of £100,000 per year. This creates all sorts of problems. What about the increasing number of parents who are employed on zero-hours contracts or those who work in the gig-economy?

That's why it's our belief that, through a National Education Service, education should be free at the point of use. So, we're going to make universally available early education a fundamental part of our offer,

and extend it to two-year-olds. Every child will be able to access properly funded, high-quality hours in a childcare or early education setting for free.

There are lots of good reasons to do this. For one, childcare is expensive, as we all know. Earlier this year campaigner Joeli Brearley claimed that the UK has the highest childcare costs in the world. OECD figures show that this is not true for all households – but it is for some and many families need to see the costs reduced.

And this is where a responsible government needs to step in. What the current government does is provide an hourly funding rate which just about everyone – nurseries, campaigners and think tanks – have called out as being too low. Even the Treasury select committee has suggested raising funding settlements. Instead, Labour would see early years as an investment in children and workers.

A combination of forces means that working in early years and childcare is one of the lowest paid sectors in our economy. I want to bring those wages up. The impact early years workers can have on childcare has the potential to be enormous. We need to attract the best and brightest to work in the sector, and pay those who have already chosen it as a career properly.

We will do this by creating a graduate-led workforce, increasing training

opportunities and getting the best out of apprenticeships.

But the truth is that at the heart of our decision making is what is best for children – and we know it's a long-term game. The full benefits of this investment may not be felt until the 2030s when children have finished school, gone on to training or university, or even entered the workplace.

It's important that we focus now on what happens in early years, what we're teaching children and whether it prepares them for the rest of their lives

That's why I believe it's important that we focus now on what happens in early years, what we're teaching children and whether it prepares them for the rest of their lives.

Visiting settings around the country, I've seen wonderful examples of fantastic early years education. Settings that understand the future is uncertain and children need

to be enabled to be self-determining, emotionally empathetic and resilient. Teachers tell me of their concerns about mental health and signs of stress in very young children. We have to nip this in the bud, supporting teachers and early years educators to deal with issues of anxiety and ensure joy in childhood.

Also, with AI potentially taking a substantial number of jobs in the future, creativity, confidence, articulacy and entrepreneurship will be invaluable skills for an emerging workforce.

Teaching children through play, exploration, risk-taking, music and role-play will all help develop that necessary resilience and flexibility. And staff also need support to deliver fresh and exciting learning, and we will encourage settings to build on-going professional development into their strategy.

And while settings focus on children, a Labour government will rejuvenate Sure Start, encouraging and emboldening parents to develop an exciting and nurturing home environment to support their children's education.

The world is uncertain, but our children deserve every opportunity. A Labour government will ensure every child in the 2020s can fulfil their true potential through quality, creative, supportive early years education. ■



Transforming northern childhoods

Not everyone leaving school or university wants to move to London or the south, but those living in most deprived parts of the north are being left behind, as *Anne Longfield* explains



*Anne Longfield is the children's
commissioner for England*

I AM A NORTHERNER BORN and bred – and proud of it too. The small market town in West Yorkshire where I was brought up shaped so many aspects of my life: my relationships, experiences, opportunities and the way I see the world. The place I grew up made me appreciate the importance of a strong community and it provided me with a good local school where the teachers encouraged me to work hard, to think for myself and to be ambitious about what I could achieve.

Most people in the north still feel that same sense of pride in their community as I had then, and still do now. Sometimes it is tempting to assume everyone leaving school or university in the north secretly wants to move to London or the south. In fact, if you ask most northern children and young people where they see their future, it is close to where they were brought up. The value they place on community is high and their ambitions are to build happy, healthy and prosperous lives close to family and friends. They want good family housing, good schools, nurseries and amenities, parks, transport and low crime rates. All of the things every parent would want for their child.

Sadly though, there are parts of the north that do not offer these good schools and opportunities. The most entrenched areas of disadvantage in the north have some of the worst schools and the fewest employ-

ment options. The result is the north-south economic divide we see today.

I want to change this so that all children, wherever they live, have the best life chances. By 2030, our ambition should be to close the education and funding gaps that currently exist between north and south. Children growing up in the north during the 2020s, including those living in the most disadvantaged areas, should be at a good school and should have the same choices when they leave as their peers in the south. The northern powerhouse and the city mayors provide an opportunity to narrow this divide and meet these ambitions, and I want them to take it. But will our new northern leaders bring about the change needed? Only if they put children at the heart of their plans.

In March 2018, I published the results of a year-long study called *Growing Up North* looking at the experiences of children growing up in and around the major urban areas of the north – Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Hull, Newcastle and Liverpool. I wanted to see whether devolution and regeneration are improving the lives of all children in the north, no matter where they live.

I toured the north of England to speak with young people about regeneration and their future hopes. Overwhelmingly, they were optimistic about where they lived and

proud of their communities. They thought the new buildings looked good and they liked the events that were happening across their city. But would the changes make a difference to their lives? Many – especially girls – thought not. Yet they didn't want to abandon the area for somewhere better. Most wanted to build lives in their local community, even many of those who planned to go to university first. This was their community and most wanted to stay a part of it – they just wanted it to offer the openings and opportunities they could see happening elsewhere.

The report made clear the difference that growing up in those disadvantaged areas of the north makes to your life and expectations. It revealed that while fewer than 5 per cent of London secondary school children are in schools rated less than good, in the north it is three times that. In the most deprived areas of the north, the most disadvantaged children are falling far behind their equivalents in the south, particularly those children growing up in London. Northern children are less likely to do well in secondary school, more likely to go to a poor school and more likely to leave education early. High numbers of children across the north are dropping out of school, missing vital parts of their education and undermining their future prospects. We need to ask why a child from a low-income

family in London is three times more likely to go to university than a similar child who grows up in Hartlepool.

The irony is that northern two to three-year-olds are more likely than their London counterparts to attend nursery – but they are also less likely to reach the expected standard of development when starting school. Many more children in the north than nationally are beginning school with high levels of development issues, but fewer children are having special educational needs diagnosed before they start school. Some northern primary schools are better than even the best in London and the south-east, yet pupils fall well behind their southern peers over the course of secondary school.

The fact is that while many children in northern schools are thriving and doing as well as any child growing up in London, those living in the most deprived parts of the north are being left behind. Too many are facing the double-whammy of entrenched deprivation and poor schools. And the schools themselves are usually facing very similar problems: weak leadership, poor governance and difficulties recruiting staff.

If this all sounds hopeless, it should not. There are many reasons to be optimistic about turning this situation around because we know that it has been done elsewhere before. Twenty years ago, London schools were the worst in the country. Yet now, children in London, who 15 years ago were behind many of their peers in the north in the early primary school years, are far more likely to have excelled by the time they leave school. They have been through an education system transformed at every level. Our ambition should be for northern children growing up in the 2020s to see the same transformation in their lives.

Today, a child who qualifies for free school meals in London is 30 per cent more likely to be at the 'expected standard' by the end of reception, than a child living in Leeds. They are making better progress at every stage of education and unless we act now, this gap will continue to rise. There is absolutely no reason why, with the political will, leadership and resources, London's progress cannot be replicated in the parts of the north that most need it.

Certainly, the creativity is there. I've visited so many great schools and local organisations in the north who are thinking big for kids – the infant school in Liverpool

teaching Mandarin, the primary school in Hull running fantastic creative writing classes, the brilliant work being done at Everton Academy.

Citywide, the work Leeds Council has done to make Leeds a child-friendly city is having a positive impact. It is thinking about how regeneration, art and sport can improve children's lives, alongside cross-area plans that assess children's needs in order to reduce vulnerability. Working with families, the city has children's centres and provide exciting new facilities for families like pop-up beaches and park activities. There are good links with business and great universities and colleges. Alongside strong schools, these are the things that make an area a good place to grow up.

If we are to give all children the best start in life, ten years from now we need to have disrupted and eradicated some of the growing threats to childhood, like poor mental health, marginalisation and gangs, and we need to build positive communities and positive childhoods. That needs to start with putting children's wellbeing at the heart of local decision-making – from the amenities and support available to the use of public spaces and planning. Too many children I spoke to as part of Growing Up North had nowhere other than the local McDonalds or KFC to go in the evenings and weekends. Arts and sports funding should be focused on giving access to those from disadvantaged backgrounds – building confidence, developing skills, raising ambitions – and even having fun.

We need to put a greater priority on children's health and wellbeing from their earliest months of life through every stage of childhood to adulthood. Thousands of schools are now measuring children's wellbeing alongside academic achievement and I would like to see this becoming the norm. Of course, as parents we want our children to get the best grades and qualifications, but we also want them to be happy, confident, have great social skills and be prepared for their life ahead.

If we are to tackle disadvantage we also need to see local areas assessing where children are most at risk and putting plans in place to reduce vulnerability, including intensive work in schools and with families. That means serious investment in areas of entrenched disadvantage to bring services together to provide early intervention to

support children through their childhood, including a new phase of Sure Starts and family hubs. A child-friendly approach, like the one pursued in Leeds, should be every northern city's ambition. The good news for those balancing the books is that treating problems early is much more cost effective as it prevents high-cost crises developing later on.

Improving the north's secondary schools in the most deprived areas must, therefore, be a national priority. There has to be a renewed focus on teaching recruitment and leadership. Cities with big graduate populations should retain talent in the north – encouraging graduates to stay where they have studied and do more to attract the best teachers to areas that most need them. Every disadvantaged area should be brimming with apprenticeships, training or education until 18 – linked into business and real jobs. I want to see the big successful local firms that are doing well in parts of the north getting into schools from Year 9, 10, 11 onwards, building closer ties and encouraging children to think about working for them. And of course more head offices, specialist research centres and national centres of art, culture and sport should be incentivised to come north. Look at the difference MediaCityUK has made to those children in Manchester and Liverpool who had ambitions for a career in the media. We can do the same for every area of industry with bold, urgent and long-term planning.

We have much to be optimistic about. As someone who lives in the north, I can feel a buzz of anticipation that this could be a period of real change for our towns and cities. But it will only happen if we look ahead to what our children need to make successful lives in their local communities and put them at the heart of the policy-making process. Every child in the north deserves to go to a good, well-funded school, with excellent teachers and help and support as they leave school to go into work, apprenticeships or higher education. They want the area in which they live to be ambitious for their futures and bring together those that can help make it happen.

Devolution has the potential to transform childhoods in the next 10 years. Northern children won't forgive us if we don't grasp this once in a lifetime opportunity and do it. **F**

A proven investment

It is easier and cheaper to create strong, happy and resilient children than it is to mend struggling, unhappy and broken adults, writes *Wendy Ellyatt*



Wendy Ellyatt is the founder and chief executive of the Save Childhood Movement

OVER THE LAST two decades it has become increasingly clear that, for healthy and sustainable development, political and economic priorities need to balance economic growth with the long-term wellbeing of society. There is also widespread agreement that current systems are failing to appropriately support the development of flourishing communities and an equitable, sustainable and stable planet.

Governments across the globe have been exploring ways in which we can better measure development and progress in terms of human wellbeing. A number of challenges have arisen in the approaches undertaken by different countries and cultures, but there has been clear agreement that measures of GDP alone are not sufficient and that we need to develop a more coherent global approach.

What kind of lives do we want our children to live? What values do we want them to have? And what kind of people do we want to them to grow up to be?

We now know that the early years is the single most important developmental phase of the lifespan and that during this period there is extremely rapid advancement and consolidation of the brain and other key biological systems. The new science of human learning and development has made it evident that what happens during the early years has lifelong effects – and this includes

the period from conception to birth. Research in both animals and humans shows that some epigenetic changes that occur in the foetus during pregnancy can be passed onto later generations, affecting the health and welfare of children, grandchildren and their descendants. Crucially, however, we also now know that positive and nurturing relationships in early childhood can inhibit the development of these tendencies.

It is during this vital phase of life that we grow our physical and mental structures and capacities, shape our sense of self and steadily adopt the external values of the adult world. Most of our limiting or self-sabotaging beliefs are formed in early childhood. Depending on whether the systems that we experience support or compromise our natural, healthy development we will grow up into happy, confident problem-solvers and risk-takers or more anxious, passive or possibly aggressive individuals – and the way that we are made to feel as children can impact how we feel about ourselves for the rest of our lives. Enormous amounts of money are spent by social care and health systems around the world trying to mend the biological and psychological damage created in adults during this vital period.

Unfortunately, in many countries we are seeing unacceptably high levels of mental and physical distress in children as they

struggle with increasingly restricted and unnatural environments that inhibit their natural development.

Young children today are struggling with pressures that were completely unknown to previous generations. There is the changing nature of family and community life; the rise in technology; the increasing influence of the media; the lack of contact with nature; the pressures of the schooling system; and the demands of having to constantly look right, achieve and be subject to the incessant judgment of others. These have all steadily eroded the environments and experiences children need in order to refine their senses and develop into happy, confident learners, in touch with themselves and the wider world. They are also living in increasingly risk-averse cultures with stressed and time-sparse adults and are subject to the constant intrusion of the commercial and digital worlds.

Investing in early childhood is therefore the most important thing that any society can do. From an economic perspective such investment brings enormous benefits later on. For example, in the USA Professor James Heckman's analysis of the Perry Preschool program, a high-quality preschool program for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, showed a 7 to 10 per cent per year return on investment based on increased school and career achievement as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health



in the well-known US Adverse Childhood Experiences studies. These revealed that for every 100 cases of child abuse society can expect to pay in middle or old age for (amongst a wide range of physical and mental health consequences): one additional case of liver disease; two additional cases of lung disease; six additional cases of serious heart disease and; 16 per cent higher rate of anti-depressant prescriptions. None of the estimates fully took account of the additional economic value of the knock-on effect that child abuse averted in one generation will itself result in a cumulative reduction in this dysfunction during future generations.

All this led the all-party parliamentary group for conception to age two to conclude in 2015 that tackling the problems associated with early life should be no less a priority for politicians than that of national defence. The argument is not only an economic one. It is about nurturing the kind of people and leaders that we need to safeguard future generations and to ensure that we can all experience lives of meaning and purpose. In other words, it is about us all being able to flourish.

Over the next 10 years governments should therefore seek to adopt the following six major policies:

1. Full adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and acceptance that the young child has biological/developmental rights that need to be protected.
2. A reversal of the current 'funding curve' to prioritise the vital importance of the early years.
3. Cross-party political commitment to promote equity in children's developmental outcomes and to ensure that all children can thrive.
4. Cross-party political commitment to ensure that education systems balance measures of attainment with those of health and wellbeing.
5. The creation of a new Department for Children and Families.
6. The appointment of a cabinet level Minister for Children. **F**

and criminal justice system expenditures. In a 2012 report the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services said: "we appear to have reached a tipping point where our knowledge and practice have progressed sufficiently to make the policy question not whether we should invest in early intervention, but how can we not do so?"

Similarly, in 2013, the Wave Trust published a report with government support which concluded "there is general expert consensus that it is somewhere between economically worthwhile and imperative to invest more heavily, as a proportion of both local and national spend, in the very earliest months and years of life." Nine approaches to evaluating the outcomes of early years' investment were reviewed in the report. Every

approach – even the most cautious and circumspect in their evaluation – found that returns on investment on well-designed early years' interventions significantly exceeded their costs. The benefits ranged from being 75 per cent to over 1,000 per cent higher than the costs, with rates of return significantly and repeatedly shown to be higher than those obtained from most other public and private investments. The study found that where a whole country has adopted a policy of investment in early years' prevention, the returns are not merely financial but in strikingly better health for the whole population. The benefits span lower infant mortality at birth through to reduced heart, liver and lung disease in middle age.

The logical links between early investments and health benefits are described

Left to their own devices?

Parents, schools and governments need to work with children to put together a new social contract for the digital age, writes *Vicki Shotbolt*



Vicki Shotbolt is the founder and CEO of Parent Zone

A CHILD BORN IN 2018 will be on the cusp of their tricky teenage years in 2030, and entirely unaware of the enormous changes that will have inevitably taken place between now and then. The gift of perspective is something children live without, until they arrive at the adult realisation that life changes around us. The question is: are we, as adults, any better placed to anticipate what's coming next? Are we ready to mitigate the challenges and maximize the opportunities of technological change over the next decade or so?

For the last 12 years, my organisation has worked with parents and families to help them navigate changing technology. Looking back to the very beginning, we were talking to parents about the internet 'going mobile', trying to prepare them for the possibility that their children would be accessing the internet on their phones. It was a tough sell. The iPhone had yet to be invented – these were the days of dial-up. Parents were sometimes happy to provide phones to teenagers as virtual umbilical cords, but few imagined that the phone would soon become a source of information and entertainment, social connection and self-promotion.

Kids were, quite literally, left to their own devices. For some, live streaming and the brave new world of social influencers offered opportunity and expanded horizons.

For others, the reality included unrealistic body images, instant access to unregulated porn and multiple ways to be manipulated and exploited.

Parents, and in turn schools and governments, woke up with a start to a brave new world of reward and risk. Traditional media, with its own axe to grind, generated moral panic, and policy-makers shuffled frantically to find policy solutions. The signs suggest we are still looking for a quick fix – a retroactive sticking plaster

The laws that have been crafted and tested over decades have failed to keep pace with technology

to deal with the complete transformation that digital technology and the internet has brought.

Children growing up in this digital world have few social norms when it comes to digital behaviour. One of the reasons for this, is that parents aren't setting rules for their children. They themselves don't know

whether it's OK to share their children's baby photos or to track them with a smart watch. They are not sure where their data is being stored, and probably feel ambivalent about the amount of time their children spend with screens, despite – or because – they are every bit as dependent on devices as their kids are.

The laws that have been crafted and tested over decades have failed to keep pace with technology and the best offered so far are 'catch up' measures. Measures that you're probably well placed to get around – ask any half-techie teen how to bypass filters and they will likely have not one, but two or three options.

But it's not hard to think through some likely scenarios and do some future-mapping.

For example, the world of the 'connected home' is already here, and children cannot take their digital privacy for granted, even after GDPR. We teach our children to think before they share information, while digital assistants like Alexa are always listening – gathering and broadcasting their personal data to the world. A child in 2030 will have no way of knowing where their data is stored, much less the ability to get it back – they will have been leaking data from birth simply by talking to their toys and the devices in their family home.

And it's not simply a question of thinking through risk. The pace of technological change means that we are tumbling over new opportunities. On the simplest level, young people are growing up in a global space open to the friendships and international perspectives that would have been unthinkable not that long ago. A child living in Birmingham is now as likely to be influenced by a vlogger in Australia as they are their schoolmates. In newly global digital spaces, children have the world at their swiping fingertips.

The question for adults is: how do we help them make sense of the global picture? As a nation, we've historically been squeamish about tackling 'difficult' topics with our children, so this isn't something that we can leave only to parents. How do we plan to talk to them about the tsunami of content they have access to online? A forward-thinking government would reject a quick update to PSHE topics in favour of a root and branch review of the whole curriculum, to reflect children's global access to information and influence.

And we must tackle both digital resilience, and digital citizenship. On the one hand, we must help children to cope with a world of online abuse and bad actors. On the other, we need to ensure they are less likely to embrace that world, by helping them understand digital democracy, and the enormous opportunities it offers individuals to effect real change: we need them to be its indefatigable advocates. We need to work with them to put together a new social contract for the digital age – one that reflects their lived experiences, and not the semi-Luddite hankerings of our own generation.

Some of the jobs for which we are preparing young people for will not exist when they leave school or university. In a decade's time, technology will have transformed the workplace. The winners will enjoy a work environment – as vloggers, gamers, influencers – that they have literally created for themselves. But others run the risk of being left out and left behind, particularly children from less well-off backgrounds who are more likely to pursue jobs in areas vulnerable to automation and artificial intelligence.

The opportunity to get it right for the next generation is now. The next government could choose to talk about 'regulating the internet' as though it were a monolith and not a complex ecosystem, or it could do something more radical. It could convene an internet commission tasked with reviewing all the pillars of protection around a child, starting with the Children's Act and the national curriculum. We can't keep bolting on solutions – we need to embed responses to the changes the internet has brought into our national laws and institutions to keep them meaningful.

We have a chance to look ahead to make sure that all children have access to the amazing opportunities that are coming, and that every young person understands the opportunities and responsibilities of living in a digital democracy, so the internet strengthens our social bonds rather than chips away at them. We can lurch towards legislation that fails before the ink has dried, or we can take a breath and do the work that needs to be done to build a digital society fit for those growing up in the 2020s, and beyond. **F**



The entrepreneurs of tomorrow

We must foster creativity in young people and give them the tools they need to succeed in the digital economy, writes *Liam Byrne*



Liam Byrne is the Labour MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill and shadow digital minister

GROWING UP IN the 2020s are a generation of digital natives. They are young people who, when they need some extra cash, don't think twice about turning to an app for a delivery gig, a platform to sell on last year's wardrobe or rent out their room. They see social media stars not only as a source of light entertainment but also as entrepreneurs whose success they can aspire to.

Thank heavens. We need that entrepreneurial zest like never before. Estimates vary of just how many jobs will be lost through automation. But we do know this: some groups will be hit harder than others. And young people, and the working class will be hit hardest of all. In fact, estimates show that some 3 million working class jobs could be wiped out by the rise of the robots. That's five times more jobs than were lost through the shutdown of coal and steel – put together.

Now, some on the left are arguing for what they call a 'post-work' consensus. Where automation is accelerated and new wealth taxed and redistributed to all with a universal basic income. Maybe one day that utopia will arrive. But in the meantime we need, not a 'post-work' consensus, but a 'good work' consensus. And that means democratising the digital revolution for the entrepreneurial talents of the next generation of young people.

Here we have a mountain to climb. Today, very few of the mega start-ups of the digital age begin life in the United Kingdom. Where are the homegrown Googles and Facebooks? Currently, Britain ranks at just 48 out of 60 in the global enterprise league table. Of the top 300 companies created in the last 30 years, only a handful are British and the only two 'British' websites in the global top 100 were actually founded across the

Our young people don't lack motivation but opportunity

Atlantic – google.co.uk and amazon.co.uk. While Britain can boast being home to over 40 per cent of Europe's so-called 'unicorns' – those new firms worth more than \$1bn – at £85bn, the total value of all European unicorns put together is just half that of Facebook alone.

Meanwhile, looking east, countries like China are steaming ahead to meet the United States. China's 89 'unicorns' are worth almost as much as America's. Grabbing emerging industries with both hands, Chi-

na's fintech and electric vehicle sectors are world leading. Over the last 15 years, cashless payments on Chinese apps like WeChat and AliPay have grown into a \$16tn market. In 2016, mobile payments in the country totalled \$9tn, dwarfing the US's \$112bn that same year. In fact, China, the ancient inventor of paper money, looks set to become the world's first cashless society.

If we're to avoid being left behind, an also-ran in the cyber age, we'll need a revolution in the way we support young people in the business of starting a business. Our young people don't lack motivation but opportunity. Almost 60 per cent of young people aged 18 to 30 say, "I would like to start my own business" – but only 13 per cent are in fact self-employed. Yet if we raised our youth enterprise to the level of Germany or the United States, we would create an extra 100,000 jobs.

Fostering entrepreneurship will demand more from the government than just a cash injection, though. Becoming a leader in the digital age requires vision. We should aim to be the most advanced digital society on earth, with government and entrepreneurs working together. Here we can learn much from Estonia, the surprising e-capital of Europe.

When Estonia emerged from the north-west corner of the old USSR, its leaders took the bold decision to reinvent the

country as a digital pioneer. Today, digital portals allow its citizens to access public services, pay tax and vote online, while the country boasts the world record for the most start-ups per person, supported by a system that demands just five minutes for an entrepreneur to register their new company.

As the UK forges a new path after years as the north-west corner of the EU, we need the same sense of purpose. We cannot allow the reactionary rhetoric weaponised by the Leave campaign to hold sway as we make policy for a post-Brexit Britain. In a digital age, old jobs from barristers to baristas may disappear, but that means we must be ready for the new jobs.

Here we can learn not only from our competitors around the world but from our own history as a great nation of innovation. Researching my book *Dragons*, I studied 800 years of British capitalism, revealing a country that was not just shaped by sovereigns and statesmen but built by some of the most extraordinary entrepreneurs on the planet. Of course amongst them are plenty of rogues and renegades, fraudsters, slave-owners, opium traders and unabashed imperialists and, of course, women were for hundreds of years frozen out of the enterprise economy by the traditional structures of patriarchy.

At its best, though, Britain's enterprise spirit has driven forward innovation, new industries and world-beating firms that not only created new wealth but invented new ways of sharing it, from Port Sunlight to Bournville to the boardroom of John Lewis. Huge firms are slashing costs, driving down wages and failing to invest in new opportunities, with UK corporates sitting on nearly £600bn. Right now, big business is failing to invest in the great new jobs of the future, so we need our enterprising classes more than ever before, to create fresh jobs in the new industries of big data or genetic medicine, cyber-security or the internet of things.

To make this a reality though, the government will have to be willing to invest in young people to become the entrepreneurs of tomorrow, starting in the classroom. Why can we not have enterprise education in every school and college? If not at school then where are young people supposed to learn how to manage a business account or apply for a loan? Without major change,

students growing up in the 2020s will be stuck with a schooling that does little to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the digital economy and with options for technical education that simply aren't good enough.

As automation reduces the number of manufacturing jobs available, we need to take apprenticeships in the service sector –

Teaching staff should have more freedom to focus on developing 'soft' skills like imagination, communication and self-motivation

which accounts for nearly 80 per cent of the value in the UK economy – much more seriously. Students starting out in their careers will need these bespoke skills to get on the ladder. But with a majority of employers saying the skills they need for the future are generic rather than highly specific, we also have to ensure their qualifications are respected and transferable to allow them to progress. At the moment, apprenticeships are a great idea poorly implemented. Courses designed by employers are often not transferable between organisations – even where the content is very similar, and we need a proper regulatory system to ensure quality.

Why can we not have enterprise education in every school and college?

Even where high-quality courses are available, students often aren't taking them up. Children and young people, therefore, need to have an entitlement, not just to education and skills, but to advice

and guidance too. From the classroom to the workplace, young people need access to specialised and personalised mentorship from a young age: careers advice that gives children the confidence to start their own business while understanding the risks and responsibilities that come with being your own boss.

We will also need to address the lack of creativity in the classroom. With a staggering variety of online learning tools to convey facts, teaching staff should have more freedom to focus on developing 'soft' skills like imagination, communication and self-motivation that are so crucial for building an entrepreneurial spirit. Technology will only become a more intrinsic part of the classroom in the 2020s, but while this generation of students might learn their French vocabulary from an app, inspirational teachers and mentors will be key in helping them develop their business idea to bring Paris techno to the West Midlands.

To give the entrepreneurs of tomorrow the tools to succeed, we need an education system that takes us from ABC to PhD. That means a total rethink of the kind proposed with Labour's National Education Service, supporting learners from cradle to grave. Meeting the challenge of established professions fading away – while new industries thrive and demand workers with new skills – will require a culture of truly lifelong learning. To provide this we must be innovative, thinking of degrees not only as courses to be completed in short, sharp bursts, but as a means of learning that people can return to repeatedly over several years.

We also continue to have a worrying deficit in STEM skills, something that could be countered by giving universities a boost, and spending 3 per cent of GDP on science like our competitors in Germany and South Korea. The government must prioritise learning to equip our young people with both the skills and the confidence they need to start their own businesses.

Great entrepreneurs make history by inventing the future. With challenges of the likes of Brexit, climate change and a rapidly changing workplace facing us, we need a future generation of entrepreneurs who not only surf the waves of change but actually shape the tides. ■

Votes and voice

If the right opportunities are put in place, we could develop a generation of politically engaged young people, argues *Jim McMahon*



Jim McMahon is Labour MP for Oldham West and Royton and shadow minister for devolution

WE CANNOT EXPECT any group to be politically engaged if they look at the system and it doesn't represent them. Nor should we, if politicians don't talk to them about the issues that matter most. For me, any conversation about improving the lives of children growing up in the 2020s should include placing them at the heart of policy making. We want policy and politics done by people, not to people – and this means young people too.

A fundamental problem that cuts through the debate is that we make platitudes about 'listening to young people' and 'giving young people a voice' – but stop way short of giving them a stake in the decisions that affect their lives. Can we expect young people in the 2020s to continue to be civically and politically engaged if it becomes clear that politicians are only creating a mirage of representation?

A starting point would be getting more young people actively involved in politics and civic society, just as with other under-represented groups. Coupled with compulsory political education in schools, I believe this is the panacea to voter apathy. We must engage the next generation of teenagers, but we must also foster the habit of voting from an early age. We can't be critical of low voter turnout and political apathy, and not change the system as it stands.

Some of the building blocks for involving young people in our democracy are in place. Locally we have a network of youth councils – like my own, the Oldham Youth Council. Our Members of the Youth Parliament debate in the House of Commons chamber from the age of 16 and MPs could learn from their well-researched and passionately delivered speeches. This goes to show that if the right structures and opportunities are put in place, then young people will become engaged in our democracy and civic institutions.

Some policy makers have gone further and given young people a direct hand in the design and delivery of the local services they use. Many Labour councils have reacted to government-forced budget cuts by giving more power to local residents to co-produce improved services. For example, Nottingham Council's Next Generation is a 'design thinking' approach to co-design services that improves the lives of young people facing multiple disadvantages in Nottingham. The Council works in partnership with young people and local organisations to better understand the challenges young people face; identify priorities; design innovative response to these challenges; and then present service recommendations for commissioners to take forward.

But we have stopped short of giving these same young people a vote in national elections. A fundamental starting point is to

enfranchise 16 and 17 year-olds by lowering the voting age. Every opposition to lowering the voting age that I've heard is framed with the question, "what have young people done to deserve this." Yet young people are under-represented at every level of British politics. The starting point for invigorating civic engagement among them should, therefore, be to create the structures which make it possible and most importantly of all, meaningful. And by meaningful, I mean politicians moving beyond talk of giving young people a voice, to actually equipping them with the power to affect change locally and nationally.

In parliament, only 2 per cent of MPs are under 30, despite 16 per cent of the UK's population being aged 18 to 29. In the period from 1979 to 2017, the average age of MPs at elections has been consistently around 50-years-old. The statistics are similar at the local level, with just over 2 per cent of councillors being aged 18 to 29. But we have seen plenty of examples where young people, when engaged, have risen to the challenge and become active in politics.

So why would votes at 16 better the lives of people growing up in the 2020s and beyond? Historically, political parties in the UK have not engaged with youth issues. Demographically we are witnessing what is referred to as a 'youth bulge' – there are more young people aged 15 to 29 living

in the UK today than at any point in our history. Globally, one in four people on the planet today are aged between 15 to 29. But in the UK, like everywhere else in the world, we have an ageing population. From a policy perspective, this means we have an important opportunity to invest in young people in order to secure our country economically, democratically and societally. Thinking about the big picture, opting to continue ignoring young people's issues is counter-productive to the interests of the UK. But how can we pledge to invest more in youth issues, but not give young people a greater say in what those issues are, and in who represents them?

Young people are more educated, vocal and politically literate than ever before. This has happened organically, through easier access to online news, articles and platforms for expressing views, though often on platforms like Snapchat that are not frequented by politicians. And it has

happened through structural changes too. For example, in 2002 the New Labour government mandated schools to teach compulsory citizenship classes – including a small dose of political education. Studies have evidenced its success in boosting civil and civic engagement, but there is a long way to go. Lowering the voting age should come hand-in-hand with statutory political, civic and democratic education in schools in the years leading up to 16. It would be a first in British history, and would lay a solid foundation for civic engagement from an early age.

Finally, there is a growing sense of awareness of the implications of decisions taken in parliament and elsewhere on the wellbeing of young people. It is an obvious point, but it has been brought into sharp focus by the Brexit vote, as well as the independence referendum in Scotland. A study by the Prince's Trust showed that over half of young people are fearful for the future following recent po-

litical events. This feeling is compounded by issues such as housing, the rising cost of education and uncertain employment prospects.

From my experience, if you put young people's issues on the table, young people will engage with politics. But that engagement will drop off if they don't have the vote. You risk apathy setting in from an early age, as young people with a hunger for politics realise their voices aren't really being heard.

We simply can't ignore the evidence of apathy and anxiety as a new generation grows up with a sense of being locked out of decisions made on their behalf. They are growing up believing politics is something done to them, not for them, and with no one seemingly fighting their corner. Brexit may not be the apex of this. We must reframe the argument, away from young people having to prove their worth, towards seeing that broader democratic participation benefits us all. **F**

© UK Parliament/Flickr



The 2015 UK youth parliament taking part in the annual debate in the House of Commons chamber

Taking centre stage

We must value the art young people create and resource them with good quality facilities, writes *Deborah Bestwick*



Deborah Bestwick is director of the south London theatre and youth arts organisation Ovalhouse

ON ANY GIVEN early evening at the Ovalhouse theatre in South London, you could find our café buzzing; young people with rucksacks sprawled on the stage, sitting on the steps or lounging on the sofas; actors who have been on TV; a director or writer who regularly gains five-star reviews in the Guardian; dancers from Corali Dance Company, that work with people who have learning disabilities; and elders from the Windrush generation who are part of Stockwell Good Neighbours, the charity who make Ovalhouse their base.

Our theatre, like many others across the United Kingdom, is social cohesion in action. And what brings all these people together is interest, engagement, and activity in the arts. In a world where economic polarisation and ideological differences push people apart, tensions – where they exist – evaporate, as shared creative endeavour brings people closer. In laughter, stories, empathy, and respect. There are many anecdotal case studies from Ovalhouse about sudden moments of understanding, whether it be when a group of 14-year-old newcomers encountered artist Alison Lapper, who is disabled, and it instantly changed their perception of disability; or the delightful cross-generational project between our Young Associates (young artists in training) and Stockwell Good Neighbours, learning to bake bread together in our café.

An inclusive organisation like Ovalhouse ensures that all voices are heard through the arts, and all members of our community can question their own and other's perceived truths of the world. No one needs to give children and young people creativity and an imagination, but the youth arts organisations and artists lend a framework through which stories told and imaginations can bring truth and challenge to us all. Without the skills and outlet of an arts education and performance arena, we run the risk of gagging a genera-

Without the skills and outlet of an arts education and performance arena, we run the risk of gagging a generation

tion and missing the all-important unheard voices. The arts rely on innovation, the constant re-invention and re-illumination of the way we see things. Without the resources to nurture young artists, we risk turning our world-leading arts into a heritage industry.

As ideas become ever more complex and sometimes hard to negotiate, the arts give young people an arena in which to test ideas and ask questions. The thin veil of fiction allows those of even violently opposing views to discuss their truths in a safe way.

How can a forward-looking government support young people to take their rightful place centre stage? Based on our experience at Ovalhouse some important ingredients of a healthy arts provision would include:

A place to go

An arts facility that is welcoming and open to children and young people, and where they have the same priority as adult professional artists. In coming to a mixed environment away from school, college or family, young people re-invent themselves. They engage as a young artist, not as 'resident from a certain postcode' or 'year 9, not good at art'. They step into themselves as artists and citizens, bringing with them their potential, not their baggage.

A platform

A place to perform, a place to exhibit, broadcast or publish. This gives public profile to the talents and ideas of young people, in a way that makes us take notice. Giving access to our stages gives young people the opportunity to contribute to their communities, and to be taken seriously.

Open-access projects

Whilst targeted and inclusionary work has its place as an entry point or means of access, it is the very escape of identity that enables young people to develop the confidence of a young citizen and bring their voice, through the arts, into a mixed integrated space. At Ovalhouse we do have targeted projects for young people with disabilities, young migrants and refugees, and we are starting a research project into the role of the arts in supporting young women with mental health issues. But from each of these projects, we have provided stable stepping stones into open-access projects, where all young people can work together. The inclusion projects have taught us the ethical and practical considerations which are needed to support all young people in an open-access environment. There is no point in advertising a Youth Theatre and expecting it to be full of young people experiencing significant barriers, unless you are able to support them. Arts policy has sometimes tended to focus on access or talent development – there needs to be a holistic spectrum.

Diversity

For the arts to be meaningful, there has to be a spectrum of stories told by the people who need to tell them to the people who need to hear. The unheard voices are the most valuable in enabling us to understand and, where necessary, change our society. We cannot do this without the authentic voices of a range of artists. Supported by a diverse staff, inspired by a variety of artists working in different cultural styles, attractive to an audience of the whole community, and signalled as such. Diversity makes a space safe. "I love it at Ovalhouse, nobody is different because everyone is different," said actor Storme Toolis, a wheelchair user, when she was a member of our youth theatre. Young people have a strong sensor for box-ticking fakery, as is evident from the spoken word performance quoted in the box. They need to know that their experience will be free from paternalism and prejudice.

Ownership

We must hand over skills to young people, so that they can take ownership of their own work. This means co-producing with young people, letting their ideas and content take centre stage. Create spaces of



Rehearsals at Ovalhouse

SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Place-making that isn't a bad approach,
I owe the think tanks a standing
ovation such innovation
could help my imagination catapult,
Passed social housing blues to show the
box tickers, statistics too have a pulse,

Is my estate a giant lab where
professionals come into study and fix us?
My breast milk was chased with
the hardship traumas of wind-rush,
I took my first footsteps in cuffs, raised
around the stars of crime-watch,
My close minded peers all kept in touch,
so if I scrap the residue of my soul,
And give you the last bit of this trust,
I ask that you meet me half way,

I don't want to be conned to fill out forms,
I will remove the chip from my shoulder
but why force me to confirm when
I also bring culture,
I'm Leonardo Da Vinci with a spray can,
I turned my estate wall into a canvas
but my hearts in a state coz,
If it's not in a gallery its urban does
art have a status?

Does theatre have a colour,
do art centre in my community
have a footfall preference,
Do I even belong?
Are they here in efforts to look cool,
Amongst the infrastructure
assisting gentrification,
adding colour to a dark estate,
Or am I also welcome?

I got all this potential; without those
expertise my options will harbour fate,
I am John Boyega with confidence
nailed to rock bottom sitting on top
of the acting skills god,
Moulded into my potential I feel lost,
coz the creative industries
are worth 84billion to the UK economy,
Still my family tells me to get a real job.

By Abstract Benna
Performed at the 'Making Culture
Work' event with Ovalhouse
and Making Culture Work



Learning lines at Ovalhouse

support where young people can make art, as they wish, beyond the demands of curriculum and attainment targets. Free them to create and express on their own terms, and give them the support and skills to make their work of the best possible quality. Understand exactly what they are doing, respecting their beliefs, experiences, and frustrations – which are not always the same as adult cultural managers’.

Respect

Let’s not assume that access to the arts always means a ticket to the opera or a naturalistic play or the ballet. Everyone has the right to see our subsidised cultural ‘greats’ but let’s also take notice of what young people produce for themselves and respect their artforms. It doesn’t always mean we

offer young people graffiti art, as the default, but it means that where they use graffiti with wit and originality – as in London’s South Bank skate park – there should be an acknowledgement of that. Young people have raced ahead using digital media to produce and distribute music, so let’s support them in that, and give them academic credits and qualifications and the transferable skills to exploit their talent. Young artists at Ovalhouse have a taste for immersive and interactive theatre, finding it more democratic and inclusive than the ‘fourth wall’ of a traditional stage. Likewise, spoken word has sprung up as a way in which young people can use lyricism and music to take ideas to an audience live or digitally, without the big costs often associated with other artforms. Resource young people to sup-

port their work with good quality facilities – recording studios, theatre facilities, a gallery that shows their work off well. Let’s value their work.

Access to great artists

The narrowing of the school experience to preclude trips and cut budgets for artists in residence often means that young people have no contact with professional artists. The situation is such that you can now pass GCSE drama without ever seeing a play live on stage. The digital reproduction is sufficient. At Ovalhouse our theatre company members are tutors, and vice versa. Young people share the same spaces and see each others’ work. We build into big projects a budget for taking young people to a wide range of performances and events – to give them a pal-

ette of styles and approaches, and inspiration for their own work. Last summer a group made a piece about their relationship with the health service inspired by the non-naturalistic techniques used in *The Curious Incident of the Dog In The Night Time*.

Time

Youth arts funding is awash with small grants, for short projects, generally designed to address gang membership, or mental health or transphobia or some such important issue. We can do a bit with this. We can create a small gateway into longer programmes of engagement. But it takes more than six months to make an impact in challenging areas. It could take 10 years. And if you can make a small difference, it will best endure with a long term stable exit strategy – in the form of ongoing well-supported inclusive open-access work. We need established core funding for that. Specialist targeted services are invaluable, but they are so often made available only to small, grassroots or volunteer organisations – though these are also invaluable. In the last year, I have twice been encouraged to apply for anti-gang funding because of our proven success in work with those ‘at risk’ – only to find that we are not eligible because of our turnover.

And sometimes the ‘big moment’ for a young person occurs through an unexpected adventure. I worked with a young woman who had been referred to many projects for sexual abuse survivors. She was then offered a sailing holiday and came back buzzing. “They let me sail the yacht, a massive yacht”. Her view of her own self-worth and capability took a leap forward the moment she took the tiller, and from that moment she was confident and creative in our Youth Theatre. You can see her name in lights these days, but of course, I won’t tell you who she is.

Amongst Ovalhouse funders, we commend the Co-operative Foundation which initially funded us for three years to enable young people to make a place for themselves to establish *The Truth About Youth* – a project designed to turn the widespread negative image of young people on its head. Seeing the effect of this work, they extended the funding for five years. This saw over 20 participants gain professional employment in the arts amid hundreds who took part and made an impact in their communities. Our national and civic agencies often want a quick win,

but the arts, though effective as therapy, (where the participant is a ‘patient with problems’) are arguably most valuable where the unexpected adventure brings us all closer to the debates and celebrations within society. Let the arts speak for itself and give it time and resources.

The participatory arts sector in the UK is a worldwide leader in terms of methodologies and innovation. The social and economic impact can be measured. For children and young adults growing up in the 2020s, I would like to see policies which:

- Ensure that every young person has reasonable access to participatory arts provision. This requires investment – perhaps matched government funding for local authorities that invest in local provision, or support for a business improvement district, that invests in the arts as part of a healthy regeneration of an area. A per-

centage of corporate tax could be invested locally, in arts provision.

- Respect the value of young people as artists as well as young audiences or recipients of education about the arts. Invest in partnerships between young people and artists and invest in those who provide training and development for a diverse new generation of artists. This needs to happen both inside the formal education system, and in more informal settings.
- Establish the leadership of UK practice on an international stage. Let’s make opportunities for our young artists to be ambassadors, to engage in international dialogue through the arts, undertake fellowships, host young people from other cultures and engage in peer learning. **F**



Team-building at Ovalhouse

An immodest proposal

The past decade has been marred by stupidity and greed.
We owe the next generation something better, writes *Chloe Combi*



*Chloe Combi is author of
Generation Z: Their Voices, Their Lives*

WHEN A MODEST PROPOSAL was published by the Irish writer Jonathan Swift in 1729, most, though not all, understood it as satire. The notion you could fix poverty by feeding poor children to wealthy men and women, caused such outraged revulsion at both the narrator and the proposal itself, sympathy and empathy grew for the poverty-stricken Irish.

If Swift had written *A Modest Proposal* in 2018, there is much to suggest that in our nuance-free times, the satire might be missed. Or that if it wasn't, loads of people would think it was a marvellous idea and there would be Daily Mail headlines, like 'Useful Scroungers!!' and 'Cooking Welfare Kids with Kale'.

In 2018, to be poor is to be a scourge, a burden, lazy, feckless and dirty. There are no Swiftian attempts to shift the narrative of blame or dislike away from poor people, and worse, there are increasingly few attempts to stop people being poor in the first place.

One of the best examples of this is our education system. At this point, it's barely even worth pretending there is any kind of equality or parity. If you are wealthy – or wealthy-ish – there is an overwhelming likelihood you will have access to, or can buy your way into, a good or outstanding school. If you are poor – or poor-ish – this likelihood decreases exponentially, and

you have a far greater likelihood of attending an average or even failing school.

There is no way to overestimate how much the quality of a school impacts on the future of every child. Attending a good school means you tend to stay there until the end and leave with a good set of examination results. You are far more likely to attend university or get a good career,

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and are less likely to commit a crime or go to prison. You are cared for by an established pastoral system, have access to great teachers and are taught in a clean, healthy environment. You are more likely to be a normal, healthy weight, and receive a well-balanced, lively education that includes all the core subjects *and* all

the important other ones so necessary for us to thrive. The list includes P.E., music, drama, art, dance, philosophy, politics, critical thinking, debating, computing, design and technology, wellness, yoga (yes, some schools practice this and report great results), home economics, etc.

Going to an under-funded, failing school often tends to mean, well, the exact opposite.

And it gets worse. Prior to a succession of governments who obviously read *The Hunger Games* and thought of it less of a horrifying, dystopian novel for young adults and more a great policy idea, there were some resources for poorer children. There was actual funding for children's charities, mental health services for the young, after-school clubs, drama classes, music lessons and sports clubs that were, if not free, at least affordable. After so many years of brutal cuts to just about every resource imaginable for young people, these services are not just vastly reduced, but totally gone. Zip, zilch, nada.

I know this to be true because I spent three years interviewing around three thousand teenagers across the UK for my book *Generation Z: Their Voices, Their Lives* – and to witness the effect of these cuts country-wide is devastating. For the young people living through them, it is so much worse. In community after community, a hole has been blown in the middle

of the cultural, community and extra-curricular lives of young people. If they don't have families with money to buy them 'luxuries' like hobbies, interests and passions, this hole is wide and festering and is getting filled up with boredom, sadness, petty crime, serious crime, depression and dislocation. What shocked me most about researching and writing Generation Z was not just the stories – of visiting food banks, hiding from bailiffs, shame over receiving free school meals, the total absence of books in the family home, the lack of cultural school trips, selling drugs to help parents make ends meet, long-defunct youth clubs that were now used for illicit activities – but the frequency of these stories. Poverty, hunger, committing crime for survival, the absence of stimulation, beauty and joy – these are no longer the exception in the UK – they are to varying degrees, the norm.

It is a travesty and a scandal that unless you have money, no one is ever going to hand you a violin and give you lessons, or teach you to paint a great picture, or pass you a script and point you towards a stage. Yet here we are, in the UK – a first world country and one of the birthplaces of great literature, drama, art, music and thinking.

Anyone who thinks this is an exaggeration or just down to poor people being lazy, feckless and unambitious should be invited to examine all the young people currently trailblazing through all these fields. With very few exceptions they are all from wealthy backgrounds and more often than not, privately educated. Rich, privately educated people aren't just born great actors, writers, musicians, politicians, speakers, dancers and designers. Someone helped them get there, and probably paid for them to do it, whether at school or university, or through costly private classes, clubs and tuition.

Interestingly, there is real concern from organisations in these fields and from universities. They recognise that if they become entirely elitist institutions, they will be less rich, interesting, and good as a result. They claim they want people to have access to the riches of their opportunities on a meritocratic basis and not on the basis of what a young person has in their bank account. And so we must take them at their word, and work to ensure this happens.

Whether we like it or not private schools exist. To live up to their charitable status they should dramatically up their intake of poorer students – and not accept a token few for show. Christ's Hospital School in Horsham is a shining example of this model – a school that is a genuine pioneer of social mobility with a high intake of poorer and minority ethnic students. The school is genuinely diverse and so successful: it is one of very few private schools that deserves the description 'transformative'.

The post-code lottery whereby in many places you are only guaranteed to get into a school if you practically live next door

The decade we are living now leading up to the 2020s has been marred by such breath-taking political and economic stupidity, ineptitude and greed

to it, has been one of the biggest drivers of inequality. It pushes up house prices around good comprehensive schools, so people who can't afford to live in those areas have no chance of getting into those schools. By no small coincidence, this lottery system also depletes schools in poorer areas of resources, money and good teachers, further perpetuating the inequality. If anyone could apply to any school they could realistically get to, without the ridiculous requirement to live within a designated postcode area, doesn't it stand to reason that all schools would improve? If parents of means and parents without means were united in the same need to make their children's school excellent, this would be a powerful force for real social improvement.

Higher up the education ladder, universities need to consider value-added entry requirements. A candidate from a deprived

school with poor examinations whose own results are, say, 80 per cent above the school's average is every bit as impressive as a candidate who gained four A*s from one of the best schools in the country. Universities need to see beyond absolute entry requirements and consider the background of a candidate. Furthermore, a candidate who has not had, for example, Oxbridge interview-training because it wasn't available to them, needs to be treated on different terms, not written off as unsuitable. In an ideal world, we'll go back to every school having excellent university-support resources, but in the short-term, this is something universities could implement now.

Ultimately, however, the thing that is going to make a real, desperately needed change in the lives of so many young people is money. If the current prime minister can find over £1bn for a minor party, why can't the same money be found for ailing parts of society – the same society she is ostensibly supposed to represent and look after?

The ill-effects caused by brutal cuts to schools, youth services, extra-curricular clubs, classes, the arts aren't going to slowly manifest themselves over 50 years – they are manifesting *now*. Growing youth crime, depression, drop-out rates, and unemployment aren't coincidences – they are a direct result of the raging inequality and class-sickness we have in this country. And things that are deteriorating don't magically stop or get better – they have a habit of getting much worse. As we look to the futuristic sounding 2020s, we have to ask ourselves what we want this decade to be like for *every* child. Good schools and education for all, high quality health care, community services, cultural investment and safe and clean housing should be essential to ensuring the strong and stable society we keep getting promised, but that remains undelivered to so many.

The decade we are living now leading up to the 2020s has been marred by such breath-taking political and economic stupidity, ineptitude and greed, we really are becoming a country that eats its young. We owe it to the next generation to remedy this *now* and bring back the promise of a bright, exciting future and country for all. **F**

Conclusion: the future we want?



Chris Keates is general secretary of NASUWT

THE NASUWT is proud to be leading on this critical debate on the future of childhood with the Fabian Society and leading thinkers and policymakers.

The authors in this collection have drawn attention to the key issues set to affect the next generation of children and young people. The essays look both inside and outside the classroom, with topics ranging from participation in the arts, to voting in elections – and from building resilience to enhancing entrepreneurial skills.

The NASUWT believes that the United Kingdom should be the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. But too much of the current focus on education policy is short-term, focusing on structures or discussions around standards for schooling.

Education policy should be longer-term in approach. We need a broader conception of the nature and purpose of education, and this must be underpinned by a determination to support children and young people. This would allow for a more purposeful reflection on what education and wider services might look like in the future.

This reflection needs to be based on the changes, challenges and opportunities that will be encountered by children and young people in the 2020s.

A key change will be the enormous technological challenges and opportuni-

ties facing children and young people as they grow up. This will require flexibility as we prepare for a world unknown. Dealing with these changes cannot only come from within schools but also from society's overall approach to children and young people.

There is a genuine risk that future generations will be consigned to lives that are less rewarding than those of their parents and grandparents

But the challenges are not just technological, as this report demonstrates. The impact of policy decisions taken in this decade on the lives of children and young people in the next decade and beyond will need to be addressed. Austerity, for example, will continue to have a negative impact on children. The result of cuts to education and educational support services, including those relating to special educational needs, will be keenly felt.

The lives of too many children and young people have been impoverished and that

will continue to take its toll in the 2020s. This will be compounded by cuts to service provisions beyond schooling that were designed to support children and young people, including Sure Start and youth centres.

Changes to education policy and schools provision have also led to the loss of dedicated and committed teachers. This has driven a recruitment and retention crisis. Additionally, too many children and young people are left at the mercy of marketised provision in education, which has limited access to opportunity on the basis of ability to pay and has restricted social mobility for many, particularly the poorest.

The future is uncertain and the education policy arena is deeply contested. This is the critical time to have a debate about the future we aspire to for our children and young people.

We need to focus on the nature of change, and the challenges and opportunities facing children and young people. We must also offer solutions in order to develop policies that provide happy and healthy childhoods which lead to happy, healthy and engaged citizens.

Without an alternative vision for our children and young people, there is a genuine risk that future generations will be consigned to lives that are less rewarding, productive or worthwhile than those of their parents and grandparents. **F**

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