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A Vision for London's Education -The launch of the NUT's manifesto for London

An education forum to identify and co-ordinate cross borough provision should be established for London, says the NUT. *

With uniquely high levels of teacher turnover, support for teachers in London is inadequate and uneven. With 300 different languages in its schools and a city in which there is an enormous range of poverty and wealth, substantial gaps exist in London's education provision.

The gaps need to be identified and a forum established to recommend ways of organising cross borough provision to plug the holes. The forum needs to be democratically accountable unlike agencies such as the Government Office for London and the Learning and Skills Councils.

The forum is part of the NUT's call for a pan-London approach to education in the capital.

The plan will be announced by the NUT General Secretary, Steve Sinnott, at the London Challenge and exhibition at the Hilton Hotel, Olympia at Mid-day, Thursday 30 September.

The NUT's plan recognises that the Government's "London Challenge" is a welcome first step but it points out that it does not tackle some of the outstanding educational needs which exist across London.

The NUT's vision calls on the Government to identify and fund the resource needs of London boroughs. It points out that some authorities have unacceptable low levels of funding yet have to respond to a complex range of needs which are cost intensive.

A lack of affordable housing compounds London's teacher recruitment and retention difficulties. Existing key workers schemes are inadequate. A London wide approach to the crisis should embrace teacher salary levels alongside initiatives such as housing associations, shared ownership schemes and preferential loan arrangements.

A pool of supply teachers should be established by London boroughs. This would improve provision and remove the costs incurred by agency fees.

The plan calls for the establishment of a network of specialist teachers' centres and a London education research centre to provide back-up for London's teachers.

Existing support for boroughs experiencing difficulties by privatising their management and administration has at best been neutral but costly and at worst disastrous in their impact on effectiveness. Instead London boroughs collectively or in partnership should provide the necessary support to authorities in difficulty.

Although the move to a common form and date for school admissions from 2005 is welcome, it does not address the issue of varying admissions criteria. There should be a common set of criteria for admissions across London. Equality of access and opportunity cannot be ensured where any form of selection exists.

Education in London must be fully comprehensive. Ethnically and socially diverse communities in London do not need a diverse range of provision which in turn sends a message to parents that some schools are better than others.

The Government's plan for academies is a recipe for division and mitigates against equality of access to education.

Steve Sinnott, launching the Challenge, said:

"The idea of London Challenge is welcome but we need to go beyond that. The NUT's concepts of a London Education Forum and a pan-London approach offer a means of fairly and equitably addressing need and discrimination.

"Educational needs are best met by publicly provided services which are high quality, free and comprehensive for all children across the age groups.

"This is a far reaching and significant declaration of the NUT's commitment to education in one of the World's greatest cosmopolitan cities.

"We will now seek the support of all teachers, parents and those who will make the decisions that will shape the future of education in London."