

Unity Conference a great success

UNIFY

TEACHER CONFERENCES 2014



One Education Union

Incorporating Professional Unity 2000

Delegates support moves to create a new unified union fit for the 21st Century

On March 1st the NUT hosted a Professional Unity Conference held in London with ATL facilitating and participating fully. This followed policy decided at the 2013 Conference which called for the NUT to organise such a conference to discuss professional unity and ways that building greater unity and especially greater organisational unity, might be achieved.

A Great Success!

The conference was open to all teachers, with speakers invited from ASCL, ATL, NAHT, NASUWT and UCAC. Messages were read out from ASCL and NAHT, and though there was no message from the NASUWT nationally, members of NASUWT were in attendance. The Conference was oversubscribed and enjoyed much enthusiasm from delegates, who called for further regional conferences in the near future!

Conference Speakers

The speakers included Christine Blower, NUT General Secretary, Dilwyn Roberts-Young, UCAC Deputy General Secretary and Mary Bousted ATL General Secretary who, as she was abroad, delivered an excellent video contribution. The keynote invited guest speakers were Ritva Semi, Special Advisor, OAJ - the trade union of education in Finland (speaking below) and Howard Stevenson, Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Nottingham. **Read what they and others say about professional unity inside.** The conference was ably chaired by Warwick Mansell, Freelance education journalist and author. A large part of the afternoon session was given over to group discussions and proposals to take the campaign forward.

"When we've got a multiplicity of teacher unions we'll have a multiplicity of tactics, and for teachers really to get their voice across, to really be able to defend education for the children of this country we need one set of tactics, one voice..."



*- Kevin Courtney,
NUT Deputy General Secretary*



A section of the NUT hosted Unity Conference 2014

In This Issue

- NUT Unity Conference
- Conference speakers
- Attendees comments
- The way forward
- How to support UNIFY

“The voice that teachers need: independent, democratic, united.” - Howard Stevenson



Mary Bousted
ATL General Secretary

“Unions are strong because of their presence on the ground, close to the schools and the colleges, and the working concerns and conditions of their members. But in an increasingly atomized system where each school is its own individual employing authority, where school leaders act like little kings in their own fiefdoms . . . when our

resources are stretched to the limit, is it sensible to compete with one another . . . ?”



Christine Blower
NUT General Secretary

“It’s clear that it makes industrial sense, it makes professional sense, and all of the teachers in the UK standing in a single union would be an immensely powerful body for influence and power on behalf of teachers and the young people whose lives we seek to improve. The NUT is very proud of

our history but we would be as proud to be part of forming one union for all teachers.”



Alison Sherratt
ATL National President

“I have always been of the opinion that the education unions should work closely together.

I attended the Professional Unity conference in March and found myself amongst colleagues from all unions. It was a positive experience and proved to me that we can

speak with one voice. We have so many common issues especially now when our profession is constantly having to survive in a culture of denigration.”



Beth Davies
NUT National President

“We are dealing with a global educational reform movement which is hitting the profession all over the world. We need to stay together, not only in this culture but within

cultures all over the world, to fight the oppression of teachers and ultimately for children.”

**Professor of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies,
University of Nottingham**

A collective voice for teachers

“Today, it is worth remembering that it took teachers 49 years to achieve national collective bargaining. This should remind us that nothing is forever, and that everything is possible. It may take longer than we might hope for, but we should never give up. Teachers’ involvement in national collective bargaining gave them a voice . . . Education reform was at the heart of the welfare state, and in the post-war period there was tremendous innovation in development in every sector of education – primary, secondary and higher.”

The political backlash

“Changes towards a genuinely comprehensive system of schooling, often driven by teachers, were not always welcomed in certain political quarters. This is why the political forces that were antagonistic to these reforms began to push back . . . attacks on teachers were made easier by the divisions that had, over time, emerged between organised teachers . . . Payment by results has returned, national pay has been abolished and Qualified Teacher Status, for long a campaign objective of organised teachers, is in peril . . . curriculum ‘reforms’ have been imposed on teachers, often against the weight of professional opinion. More recently, the drive to privatise the state school system has become increasingly apparent.”

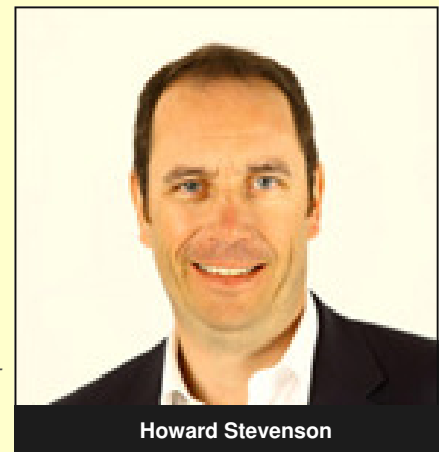
The case for a single union

“Only teacher unions can claim to represent all teachers, be genuinely independent and robustly democratic. Teachers need that collective, independent, democratic voice. Unions provide it – but to provide it effectively they need to unite. That will not be easy – but we should not allow something being difficult to stop us from doing what is right . . . Teachers have the power in their own hands – it already exists. The problem

of course is that it is weakened by being divided. The challenge therefore, and why we are all here today, is to discuss how we overcome those divisions and bring the different unions together. As I have indicated – it will not be easy. But we should not underestimate what a popular and galvanising message it can be. The argument for a single union, and

for a teacher voice that is impossible to ignore, is very attractive to a profession that often feels marginalised and devalued. Campaigning for such a union also offers huge possibilities to reconnect teachers to unionism and to reach out to many younger teachers who have little experience of being in a profession that is valued and respected. There is much to play for, which is why today is so important.”

(The full speech will be available on the updated UNIFY website from May)



Howard Stevenson



Peter Pendle

ATL Deputy
General Secretary

“Professional unity means, for me, education professionals speaking and

being able to campaign with one voice.”

Gawain Little

NUT National Executive

“In my workplace we have teachers from different unions, but we all meet together, and we all talk together, because we know that it’s only when we work together that we can do the best for our colleagues and for our students.”



Martin Powell-Davis

NUT National Executive

“The discussion showed that, while today might only have been a

‘tentative’ step, teachers want concrete steps towards unity to be taken speedily.”

“The voice is strong” - Ritva Semi

Special Advisor, OAJ, The Trade Union of Education in Finland

Unity of the teacher organisations has been a success story for teachers and education in Finland

“There have been thousands of education tourists, visitors and education experts who have come to study how the country with 5.5 million inhabitants, up in the north, can get such good results in OECD’s Pisa assessments . . . But what is the lesson that can be learnt from the Finnish success? . . . In a nutshell the Finnish lesson is co-operation, working together to confront all challenges.”

There are no rapid advances in education

“In the 1970’s Finland established a 9-year long comprehensive school system for all children . . . [previously] children were divided into those who went on to costly secondary school and those who stayed in elementary school. At the same time great decisions regarding teacher education were made. All teachers in comprehensive school should have a masters degree. This decision was great but it took a long time to implement because of course the teachers who had the old teacher education kept their qualifications. In this year 2014 the very last teachers with the old teacher education start their retirement. This is an example of the fact that in education you have to make long term decisions; there is no possibility to get instant success.”

School reform started teacher unity

“In the beginnings of 1970’s there were several teacher unions in Finland. All different teacher groups had their own union, Before the great education reform elementary school teachers and secondary teachers were rather far from each other. At the same time as the great school reform these two teacher unions understood that if they wanted to be strong in the new education system they had to unite. In 1973 they took this huge step, decided together, as one union to start the strong safeguarding of the interest of teachers . . . Finland underwent an awful financial crisis in the early 1990’s. There were school closings, education budget cuts, teacher layoffs. Today we can say that we would never have survived if the unions had been in competition with each other. During these very difficult times it was a victory for teachers and education when there was only one united OAJ against an employer at national level and at local level . . . It is the voice of teachers from early childhood education to the university level. And the voice is strong.”

All teachers groups are important, all voices have to be heard

“During these OAJ years the teacher union has become stronger and stronger. Since 1984 there has not been any need to strike [though they have been threatened]; all problems have been solved by negotiations . . . Today OAJ has a place in every working group where education is discussed in the ministry of education or in the national board of education. The Education Committee in parliament wants to hear our opinion when education laws are prepared. OAJ is almost daily in the media. The dialogue inside OAJ is sometimes strong when different teacher groups are discussing. But when we leave the headquarters, there is only one OAJ voice. In OAJ we keep the main focus on safeguarding the interest of teachers. There is a need to fight for better salaries for teachers and more resources for education.”



Ritva Semi

(The full speech will be available on the updated UNIFY website from May)

What they say on Unity



"At the moment we have three unions working in my workplace. We'd be a stronger force if we were united" - Bridget Chapman

"Professional unity doesn't just mean fighting for better rights for teachers, it means fighting for a better education for all our children" - Aisling MacSweeney



"Let there be strength in unity. We need to work together for the sake of our members and for the sake of our pupils. Teachers and lecturers have much common ground. Professional unity is a reality." - Dilwyn Roberts-Young, UCAC Deputy General Secretary

"For me professional unity is about giving the profession one clear, strong voice" - Andrew Baisley



"To be an effective workforce, where government listens to our concerns, takes our protests seriously, the only way is to unite and lead" - Clare Erasmus

"If you have one stick it's easy to break it. You put a bundle together, you can't break it. That's the strength of unity" - Herbert Bukari



The Way Forward

Fred Jarvis, NUT General Secretary 1975-89



"The issues that lay behind the divisions between our main unions are no longer valid. Today, not only are the NUT, NASUWT and ATL all TUC-affiliated, but all criticise the government's policies in a similar way. And there is now more agreement between them on educational and professional issues than ever before. With the spread of academisation and free schools and the undermining of local authorities, we are witnessing the fragmentation or destruction of our education system. Instead of dealing with some 150 or so local authorities, the unions will have to contend with

thousands of semi-autonomous workplaces, umpteen federations and a growing number of chains. Nobody should think that a merger will be an easy task. There would doubtless be anxieties and practical problems, with much to discuss in respect of governance and policymaking. But with goodwill and recognition of the challenges now faced by the teaching profession, these problems could be overcome." (Times Educational Supplement, 29th March 2013. The full article will be available on the updated UNIFY website from May.) Fred also made an excellent contribution from the floor at the Conference.

Hank Roberts, Organising Secretary UNIFY



"It is urgent that we move to make progress now, without delay. Delay will only help Gove and the Government. To resist, to eventually overcome and defeat them, we need to be organised and united. We cannot afford to be divided. A huge part of the answer, though not a universal panacea, is that the education unions should unite. Not simply in policy and action which would eventually breakdown, but organisationally. A new union fit the 21st century should be created. Non recognition (of all unions) in free schools and academies has started and is an integral part of their assault

on state education and education unions. If we don't make changes to meet this massive threat we will be all in it together – deep in the slough of despond. We have a great deal of professional unity in our workplaces, the problem is we haven't got it nationally, and that's what we've got to achieve. Join with us. Support UNIFY. Let's make it happen."

Support UNIFY

Call joint local meetings in your school and at local level.

Promote joint union action

Invite a UNIFY speaker to your meetings

Affiliate to UNIFY with our online membership form

Annual membership fees:

£30 for associations, divisions, branches and federations

£10 for schools, colleges and universities

£5 for individuals, who can alternatively become a lifetime

Contact UNIFY for more information about our cause and how you can best support it:

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