

# Conservative Education Reloaded: Policy, Ideology and Impacts in England

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## Abstract

*This article, written in December 2016 following the election in May 2016 of a majority Conservative government, and the election to the leadership of the Labour Party of Jeremy Corbyn, a left-wing social democrat, 'Old Labour style socialist', revises and updates substantially a previous article of June 2015 published in this journal (Hill et al, 2015).*

*We set out, in Part One, empirical data about the current stage of capitalism, the Immiseration stage of neo-liberal capitalism in England and highlight its relationship with conservatism and neo-conservatism. We identify increased societal inequalities, the assault by the capitalist State on its opponents such as local councils and trade unions.*

*In Parts Two, and Three we describe and analyse what, respectively, neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism have done and are doing to education in England- in the schools, further education, and university sectors, and the continuity with policies of previous Conservative and Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition governments.*

*In Part Four, we present three testimonies about the impacts of neo-liberalism/ neo-conservatism, two from the school sector, one from the further/ vocational education sector, and briefly signal areas and forms of resistance. (1)*

**Key Words:** *immiseration, neo-liberalism, neoconservative, education, policy, precarity*

## Introduction

Neo-liberalism is marked, *inter alia*, by the marketisation, commodification and degradation of public services, together with their managerialisation and privatisation/ pre/quasi-privatisation (Giroux, 2004, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Ross and Gibson, 2007; Hill, 2012, 2013a, b; Hill and Kumar, 2009; Hill and Rosskam, 2009). Neo-liberalism does not come unaccompanied. It has a twin- and a sometimes fractious relationship with – neo-conservatism- a concern with order, hierarchy, obedience, control (Hill, 2001). Britain, together with the United States, is and has been one of the centres of neo-liberal/neo-conservative transformation of economy, society, and of education globally.

The transfer of wealth from workers (by which, following a Marxist class analysis, we mean `middle class and `working class` workers, that is, those from different strata of the working class, those who / whose families sell their labour power) has been unparalleled since the 1929 capitalist crisis/ the 1930s Depression, both globally and nationally. The situation, the widening class divide- between the capitalist class and the working class in England replicates that of the global situation- a situation in which 62 individuals own as much wealth as half the world's population (Oxfam, 2016). In the United Kingdom. `the richest one per cent 'have as much wealth as the poorest 57 per cent combined' (Chu, 2015).

This wealth has been extracted as surplus value- or profit- from the labour of the workers, whose individual and social wage has been and is being cut, and who are suffering not only `relative immiseration' (with the gap between them and the capitalist class growing wider), but also `absolute immiseration' (Hill, 2012, 2013a, 2013b)- absolute pauperisation and impoverishment, such that millions of families do not have enough income or wealth to pay for adequate food, heating, shelter and clothing. In contrast, globally, the capitalist class and their corporations, have succeeded in reducing their tax payments, and in reducing not only the individual wage for workers, but also the `social wage' - public funding for welfare, social and public services- such as education.

They have achieved this, through the governments representing their class interests, through cuts in the real value of spending in these services, but also through privatisation and part-privatisation of public services. This is evident in the UK, and, in particular, England. (Wales and Scotland have, regional/ national governments/ Assemblies that are more committed to directly providing services and have resisted to a greater extent than in England, the privatisation- selling off- and pre-privatisation of public services such as the National Health Service, and Schooling and Further and Higher Education).

## **PART ONE: The Neo-liberal/ Neoconservative Social and Economic Revolution in Britain and its Impacts: The Societal Context**

### ***The Poor***

After the longest and deepest recession since the Wall Street Crash in 1929 that led to 'the hungry 30s', a plethora of studies, as set out below, in particular by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015, 2016a, b, c, d) reveal shocking levels of income-inequality, health inequality and absolute poverty across the country. The neo-liberal policies pursued by successive Conservative governments during the 1980s and into the 1990s did more than reverse the small narrowing of income inequality that began to manifest itself in the 1970s. Those policies unleashed a dramatic intensification in income-inequality, with its resultant individual and social/ community distress. The New Labour administrations of 1997-2010 managed at best to stabilise the situation for adults. The Conservative/Liberal-Democrat Coalition government of 2010-2015 gave a further boost to inequality of all kinds. Cuts to welfare and other public spending, and harsh pay and pension policies hit the most vulnerable at the same time as executive pay and bonuses returned to levels comparable with those which characterised the months preceding the great financial crash of 2008. Since 2008 the proportion of people living on an income less than the level necessary for a minimum acceptable living standard has increased year on year.

The UK has been experiencing unprecedented falls in real wages and living standards. Median real weekly wages have fallen by about 10% in the UK since 2008. Real wages have fallen right across the wage distribution, and the young have been especially hard hit. Wage inequality is at its highest level since the end of WW2 (Machin, 2015). Machin offers several reasons for this, including the decline in union membership and density; new welfare conditionality; willingness by workers to accept low-wages jobs and zero-hours contracts rather than face unemployment; and a failure to share out equally gains in productivity.

Reports by organisations such as The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2015, 2016a, b; c, d; Social Market Foundation, 2015) testify to the depth of poverty, low pay, reduction in welfare benefits. In the words of an *Independent* headline (Morris, 2015) 'Britain's divided decade: the rich are 64% richer than before the recession, while the poor are 57% poorer'.

the average wealth of the best-off, one-fifth of families rose by 64 per cent between 2005 and 2012-13 as they put more money aside as a buffer against future shocks. They have average Savings and investments of around £10,000 compared with £6,000 seven years earlier.... However, the SMF found the poorest 20 per cent are less financially secure than they were in 2005, with their net wealth falling by 57 per cent and levels of debt and use

of overdrafts increasing. Meanwhile, the inter-generational gap in incomes and wealth has widened significantly. The wages of those aged 26 to 35 fell steeply and they are far less likely to be property owners, with the proportion in this age bracket who are buying a home falling from nearly three-quarters in 2005 to just over half in 2012-13.... On average, they have less than a week's income in savings, owe 45 per cent more money than they did in 2005 and are increasingly running up overdrafts to pay their bills. (Morris, 2015, reporting on the May 2015 report by the Social Market Foundation, *Wealth in the Downturn: Winners and Losers*).

In April 2016, the definition of minimum income threshold assumes a single person of working age needs an income of £17,900 before tax deductions and a couple with two children at least £18,900 each (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016a). The Minimum Income Calculator defines the income required to have not just food, shelter and clothes, but also to be able to be a participant in society. It includes, for instance, the ability to pay for a week's holiday in the UK, or a second-hand car for families with children. It assumes no cigarettes or visits to the pub. The level was decided after discussion with the public through focus groups and has been used in the past as a benchmark for the living wage (Wintour, 2015). The current legally enforceable Minimum Wage in the UK for those aged 25 and over is £7.20 per hour, £4.00 per hour for those under 18 (Government, 2016).

Families with children are at greatest risk of having an inadequate income with more than 1 in 3, or 8.1 million parents and children, falling into this category, up by more than a third since 2008. Those families headed by lone parents are under the greatest pressure, with 71% (2.3 million individuals) living below the required level (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015).

A 2016 JRF Report (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2016b) into actual destitution- *actual destitution* as opposed to inadequate income- in the UK found that '1.25 million people, including over 300,000 children, were destitute over the course of 2015', destitution being defined as 'not being able to cannot afford to eat regularly, keep clean and stay warm and dry'. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016c).

The December 2016 Report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016d) found that 55% of those in poverty are now in working households, a record high, a total of 7.4 million people – 1.1 million more than in 2010-11. Among them are 2.6 million children.

### ***The Rich***

On the other hand, the Rich are doing well. According to the *Sunday Times* Rich List for 2016, the 1000 wealthiest families and individuals in the UK have a combined

wealth of £547billion. Their wealth has more than doubled in the past decade (Brinded, 2016). The list features Sir Philip Green, who took £400M out of British Home Stores between 2009 to 2015, allowed a massive hole to develop in the company's pension scheme, sold the company for £1 n 2015, and watched it collapse with the loss of over 11,000 jobs.

At the same time, the very rich continue to secure staggering 'bonuses' and enjoy a light regime of personal taxation. Many benefit from storing wealth in tax havens, and make use of a host of 'tax avoidance' schemes to minimise their liabilities. The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), some of whose members are employed to collect taxes, estimates that in the financial year 2013/14 there was a 'tax gap' of almost £120billion, made up of taxes evaded, avoided or paid late (Murphy, 2014).

### ***Health, Death and Widening Social Class Differences***

In addition to the hunger, stress and despair which are the fruits of such an unequal society, these widening gaps in income and wealth, accompanied as they are by the decline in services, welfare and labour benefits, result in the poor dying even earlier on average than the rich. Under 'Austerity Capitalism' 'the gap between the lifespans of rich and poor people in England and Wales is increasing for the first time in almost 150 years' (Pells, 2016).

And there are huge social class differences in years of healthy life- in London

Women living in Richmond can look forward to 72 years of "healthy life" - compared with just 54 for women in Tower Hamlets. That equates to people in the East End's most deprived borough losing almost a year for every stop on the District line that links them to Richmond. The difference is only slightly less for men - with 70 healthy years for those in Richmond, compared with 55 in Tower Hamlets' (Lydall and Prynne, 2013).

There is significant impact of neo-liberalism on women because of the nature of their job segregation in catering, cleaning, caring and retail and in part-time jobs.

Helen (2016) reports that

The Research shows the richest 5% of men in Britain are living on average to 96.2 years, 34.2 years longer than the poorest 10%. The gap has grown by 1.7 years since 1993, when it was at its narrowest. The richest women reach on average 98.5 years, 31.5 years more than the poorest. The female gap reached its smallest in 2005, but has since grown by 0.4 years.

The social class disparity in years of life and years of healthy living is a general product of increasing inequality, across neo-liberalised economies/ societies. Thus in the USA,

The poor are losing ground not only in income, but also in years of life, the most basic measure of well-being. In the early 1970s, a 60-year-old man in the top half of the earnings ladder could expect to live 1.2 years longer than a man of the same age in the bottom half.... Fast-forward to 2001, and he could expect to live 5.8 years longer than his poorer counterpart.... for men born in 1920, there was a six-year difference in life expectancy between the top 10 percent of earners and the bottom 10 percent. For men born in 1950, that difference had more than doubled, to 14 years. For women, the gap grew to 13 years, from 4.7 years. (Tavernise, 2016).

## **The Neo-liberal/ Neoconservative Attack on its `Enemies`: Local Councils/ Local Democracy; Trade Unions**

### **The Attack on Elected Local Councils/ Local Authorities**

Neo-liberalising governments have sought to emasculate those organisations opposing them. A hall-mark of neo-liberal capitalism in Britain has been the stripping of local authority powers to directly provide, manage and control education services that have been regarded, historically, as public (publicly financed, publicly managed) services. Colin Copus (2001, p.479) describes British local government as `constitutionally unprotected from the political ideologies, policies, priorities, and, indeed, caprice of central government'. This is particularly evident in the provision of the National Health Service, in the provision of education and in Welfare provision, such as the care industry.

The neo-liberal journey since the 1980s, has led down a marketised and competitive road, with a customer/client split imposed across public services, competitive tendering and the substitution of commissioned rather than directly provided services by local authorities. The incorporation of (Further Education) Colleges, the establishment of Housing Associations and “partnership” arrangements that involve the private sector have replaced a public service ethos with one heavily influenced by income generation and profit.

The effects on education have been incremental, as successive governments have driven the agenda forward towards a fragmented system, ripe for extending the quasi-privatisation to full sale/scale. These practices can constitute what is in the business world known as investment or asset stripping (Parish et al., 2012). Entirely predictably, this policy-drive has resulted in a range of petty corruption scandals and

the misuse of public funds in the ownership and management of Academies and Academy Chains, as detailed below.

### **The Attack on Trade Unions**

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government of 2010-2015, as do governments in general, understood that organised workers can mount the most potent defence of the poorest in society. Uniquely positioned under capitalism because they are organised at the point of production, organised workers have the power to disrupt for sustained periods or to halt the process whereby capital expands. Hence the desire on the part of the government to keep and strengthen existing anti-trade union laws, and further to weaken trade unions. Union density in the UK has halved from a high of some 13 million members in 1980 (Joyce, 2015). In the UK there are currently 6.4 million members of trade unions, 25% of the workforce, with 14% of the private sector being unionised, compared to 54% for the public sector (TUC, 2015).

In terms of defending the Welfare State and fending off immiseration, the main problem has less to do with the sheer number of union members or the density of membership in particular sectors, and more with the depressed level of class-consciousness. The residual effects on trade union leaders of, firstly, the defeats inflicted by the Conservative administrations between 1979 and 1997, in particular the government defeat of the National Union of Miners in 'The Great Miners' Strike' of 1984-1985) and secondly the maintenance by New Labour of draconian anti-trade union laws, has also played a part in weakening the overall labour movement and sapping its self-confidence. Industrial unions are still more likely to have a strong sense of solidarity and common purpose, but they are few and far between. The three biggest general unions represent the majority of unionised workers, but are composed of a disparate collection of people in a large number of trades and professions and income levels.

An important aspect of the impact of neo-liberalism on workers' organisation- on trade unions- is the intense fragmentation of services with a multiplicity of employers. Together with anti-trade union legislation, casualisation, the so-called 'gig economy' (an economy where temporary positions are common and organizations engage in contracts with independent workers for short-term engagements) and the break-up of industries, it has made organising labour a much more difficult task than previously. Various teacher testimonies, such as the three reported in this article below, exemplify the 'culture of fear', even for those on 'permanent contracts'/ tenured contracts, which, *inter alia*, often inhibits union effectiveness. Those employed on zero hours or temporary or other forms of casualised contracts are even less likely to 'speak out'.

### ***New Restrictive Legislation for Trade Unions and Strikes***

Regarding Trade Unions, following their election victory in 2015, one of the very first policy announcements of the new Conservative government (then led by David Cameron) was that there would be new legislation, restricting the ability of trade unions to go on strike. The new law would 'outlaw any strike not voted for by at least 40% of eligible union members'. But in the case of 'essential' public services – health, education, transport and fire services turnouts must reach 50%. And 'current "scab" laws that ban employers from hiring temporary agency staff to fill in for strikers were to be abolished. (Toynbee, 2015). As Toynbee further notes,

Britain already has among the toughest strike laws in the EU. Unions must give seven days' notice before a strike ballot and then wait another seven days before striking. Rules about ballots are so complex that it's easy for employers to take out injunctions for small infringements. A 40% threshold is remarkably high, since David Cameron's government rules on just 24% of the electorate, with only 66% turning out.

The Trade Union Act 2016 received Royal assent in May. Thanks to a sustained union campaign, it has been slightly amended, so that the ballot-thresholds are more attainable. The most draconian anti-picketing restrictions have been dropped.

The repeal of the ban on hiring agency/temporary staff during a strike was shelved because of the many disputes over the Bill. The Trade Union Act 2016 represented a wholesale attack on trade union organisation beyond the ballot thresholds. Some clauses were successfully fought off, such as restrictions on levies to political funds and a ban on collection of subscriptions from pay-roll.

### ***Casualisation/ Precarity: The Attack on Workers Contracts': Zero Hours Contracts***

There is a serious pay gap between those working on casual contracts and those working on permanent contracts. The greatest pay deficit among casualised workers is experienced by those on zero-hours contracts. Another group which includes casualised workers are part-time workers. The part-time pay penalty particularly experienced by women is a gap of nearly 40 per cent which has hardly changed in 20 years. (Healy and Bergfeld, 2016, p.6).

The spread of 'zero-hours' contracts is a notable case of exploitation. A 2013 *Guardian* report comments:

Research by the Resolution Foundation think-tank shows that those on zero-hours contracts earn less than those ... on fixed-hours contracts. They have no rights to sick pay. Holiday pay is often refused. And there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to show that if they turn down work when it is offered – even if it is to take a child for a medical appointment – they will be pigeon-holed as not suitably "flexible". The choice to refuse work is, in reality, no such thing (Elliot, 2013).



28 days holiday per annum is a legal entitlement, but it can be avoided if staff are self-employed. That is not to say that some employers may break the law in the sure knowledge that employees with precarious contracts are not likely to complain. The Office of National Statistics figure for the last quarter of 2015 shows that over 800,000 workers were on zero-hours contracts, some 2.5% of the employed workforce. This is an increase of 15% from the same period in 2014. Many workers are forced to have more than one such contract in an effort to get by (Farrell, 2016).

The scope and contentious nature of zero-hours contracts was acknowledged by the UK government who ran a public consultation on the subject from December 2013 to March 2014 (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). However, the consultation was limited to the concerns around the transparency of the contracts and the inclusion of exclusivity clauses. Following the consultation, the only reform in the use of zero-hour contracts has been to ban the exclusivity clauses, as announced by the then Business Secretary, Vince Cable, in a press release that also emphasised their importance in offering flexible working opportunities (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014).

A House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee report on the issue of zero-hours contracts in Scotland (cited in Duncanson, 2014), however, acknowledges much wider problems: that the flexibility of the contracts benefit only employers, and workers are too fearful of dismissal to not accept proffered work, no matter how inconvenient; many employers are either ignorant of zero-hours workers' rights, or are wilfully blocking access to them; it is unrealistic to expect low-paid workers to challenge unscrupulous employees through an expensive legal system. The use of zero-hours contracts is creating a two-tier workforce based on precarity. At present there is no legal definition of zero-hours contracts and, although this is necessary, it should not be enshrined until there is legislation minimising the use of such contracts, and ensuring workers' rights; and that the alarming increase in the use of zero-hours contracts must be reduced as a matter of urgency (House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, 2014). None of these concerns were publicly acknowledged by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government of 2010-2015, or by the Conservative government since its election in May 2015.

Even among some of those with the sharpest interest in seeking to revive and sustain global capitalism it is argued that the unprecedented growth in income inequality is not a sign of underlying strength but a key driver of instability. The 2012 International Monetary Fund working-party report presented a revealing analysis:

This paper makes both an empirical and a theoretical case that increases in income inequality tend to lead to increases in current account deficits in developed economies. Our stylized facts and cross-sectional econometric evidence are strongly supportive of this hypothesis. They suggest that the magnitude of the effect is large, to the point that for the United Kingdom it can approximately explain the entire current account deterioration experienced between the late 1970s and 2007. (Kumhof et al., 2012, p.25)

In the 2015 general election campaign **(2)** the issue of zero hours contracts became prominent. The then Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, promised to abolish most such contracts (Grice, 2015). The then (in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government) Department of Work and Pensions Minister, Ian Duncan-Smith, on the other hand, 'thinks zero-hours contracts aren't that bad, they just have an image problem' and said in TV interviews that zero-hours contracts 'were "wrongly named" and should be re-branded 'flexible hours'' (Elgot, 2014). One of the difficulties is the labelling of insecure contracts. There are alternative phrases in use such as on-call staff. The important feature is the insecurity and unpredictability of income which also messes with welfare payments.

## **PART TWO: The Neo-liberal Revolution in Education in England and its Impacts**

Education, together with other public services in Britain, has been subject to neo-liberalisation since the Thatcher governments of 1979-90, the most far-reaching through the Education Reform Act of 1988, which was the fruit of many years' work by hard-right elements to construct 'an education-system which is divisive, elitist and inegalitarian' (O'Hear, 1991, p.38; Hill, 1997).

The 1988 Education reform Act established classic neo-liberal policies of forcing the marketisation of schooling (through "parental choice" and through "league tables" of schools ranked by published test results). Under the "Local Management of Schools" (LMS) section of the 1988 Act, local authority/school district influence was further weakened, when budgetary control was partially handed to school head teachers, principals and governing bodies, taking most budgetary control away from the democratically elected local education authorities (LEAs) (Ball, 1990, 1994; Hill, 1997, 2001). Full delegation of funding to individual schools began in 2001 and has been a gradual process reaching its apotheosis with the current Academy School funding agreements that bypass LEAs altogether, with direct funding from the (national) Education Funding Agency. This mechanism, unprecedentedly, gives control of each Academy's funding to the Secretary of State for Education. In the Further Education and the Higher Education sectors, LEAs were also estranged significantly from education in 1992 when polytechnics became universities, and in

1993 when Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges became corporations, no longer under the control of LEAs.

Thus, Conservative policy aimed at granting budgetary autonomy to set schools 'free' from local democratic oversight, to re-managerialise schools, colleges and universities (through what has been called 'new public management' characterised by often brutalist, top-down control). The result has been to establish conservative curricula negating the creative and critical subjects in favour of optimising schools' results. This has been mobilised by intensifying school competition through high stakes testing and the establishment of 'league' tables and to increase control and surveillance over teachers (and university staff). This classic mix of neo-liberal and neoconservative policies was termed by Andrew Gamble (1988) '*The Free Economy and the Strong State*'. Successive Conservative (1979-87), New Labour (1997-2010), Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010-2015) and Conservative (2015) governments have intensified the neo-liberalisation of schools, colleges and universities dramatically, alongside cuts in funding, since 2010 (Chowdry and Lupieta, 2011; Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2016).

One controversial and hugely contested (on the streets) recent cut was (from September 2011) that of EMAs, Education Maintenance Allowances, paid to young people aged 16–19 from poor families, of (usually) £30 a week, to encourage them to stay on at school (3). Most EMA recipients were in 'further education'/ vocational colleges, which is where two-thirds of 16-19 year olds are. For university students the free university education that, for example, some of the writers of this article received has been replaced by the imposition of annual university tuition fees of (usually) £9,000 per annum (see Hill, 2010a) and likely to rise in the near future as the government removes the so-called funding 'cap'. The New Labour—i.e., neo-liberalised Labour government of Tony Blair—abandoned free university education and introduced tuition fees for home students in 1998. (Thatcher had already introduced fee for overseas students [Maisuria, 2015]) as part of his 'modernisation' reforms.

Ideologically these neo-liberal developments can be interpreted as what Rikowski (e.g. 2002, 2003, 2008) presciently termed "the businessification" of education, the softening up, the preparation for the wholesale privatisation of schools, vocational colleges (called, in Britain, Further Education colleges; sixth form colleges and university technical colleges (Academies), and universities. There is an already extensive edu-business sector, channeling public monies for education into the pockets of private shareholders, notably via the public examination system. Pearson, a global edu-business, is the UK's largest 'awarding body' (or exam board). Schools

must pay to enter their students for public exams. A proportion of the money paid by those sitting Edexcel (the Awarding Body) GCSE or A level will find its way to Pearson shareholders.

### **Marketisation and High Stakes Testing and their Impacts**

With schools in England, there is now a system of market competition between individual schools. Under the 1944 Education Act, which the Thatcher 1988 Education Act replaced, local authorities and school districts, which were directly elected, had allocated children/students to schools, sometimes taking into account a degree of parental choice, but sometimes attempting to ensure that within a largely comprehensive or all-attainment intake of students, there was a mix of students of all “bands” of attainment (Hill, 1997, 2001), what in the US is termed all “tracks” of students. In many Local Education Authorities/ school districts there were, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, distinct attempts at social mixing.

Neo-liberalism requires that in a market, it is necessary to be able to test the efficiency and value of the products. In England there is now a very rigid system of testing children at different ages, starting from the moment they first enter the schools, that could be at either age four or five, which means that children are ranked and labelled from that moment. The exam and assessment results of the children are used to compile a league table of schools in every municipality; in every part of the country, in every area, there are league tables of schools. School places are still mostly allocated on the basis of catchment areas. The effect of this is to skew house prices as middle-class parents move into areas with the ‘best schools’. It makes a difference street by street. And for those who do not gain entry into a ‘desirable’ school, it is middle-class parents who have the means, the cars, the ability to pay transport costs, to take the children to the schools that have higher results, which may be some distance away.

The direction of higher education policy is a case in point of the shift of university education being a public utility for the greater good, i.e. a well-educated society is good for social relations and the economy, to a conception of universities being a commodity trading customers (students and their brand) in a marketplace. The Higher Education White Paper 2016, entitled *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility & Student Choice*, (Department for Business and Skills, 2016) is ostensibly a State intervention to establish the legal framework for universities to operate as businesses in a competitive market.

### ***Academies, the Pre/quasi-privatisation of Schools***

The Blair New Labour government of 1997-2007 extended Conservative government policy and introduced 'Academy Schools', the England equivalent of Charter Schools in the USA. These are state schools handed over to third parties including private companies and corporations to run, as yet, in England, on a non-profit making basis, in the neo-liberal ideological belief that 'private business knows best', and can run/ manage public services better than can the public sector. The concept of an 'Academy' was inspired by the Conservative attempt to establish City Technology Colleges in the 1980s. Homage was duly paid when the first tranche of these new establishments were labelled City Academies. They were designed 'to make a difference to areas of disadvantage' by allowing private sector sponsors to take over allegedly-underperforming or 'failing' State secondary schools (some of the early ones were all-through, 3-18) with tax-payers' money and a contribution of £2million that few sponsors paid. Sponsors were given freedoms to run the schools more like businesses. These freedoms included being exempt from local authority oversight. This process built on the earlier 'Local Management of Schools' (LMS) section of the 1988 Act, whereby budgetary control over money allocated to a school by the LEA was handed to school Headteachers/ Principals and Governing Bodies, weakening local authority (LA) or school district influence. (Ball, 1990; Hill, 1997, 2001)

The Academies and latterly the Free Schools programmes (Free Schools are a variety of Academy) that can be set up by a group of parents, academy chains or local authority community schools whether or not there is a need for new school places in the area) are major components of the gradual re-configuration-cum-dismantling of State educational provision. They are State funded schools that are taken out of local authority control, and are run by private control, usually by a chain of Academy schools. Thus, in the school sector, State-funded schools are actually being handed over to private companies, to chains of schools, to a variety of religious organisations, to become Academies. They were formerly known as City Academy Schools (Beckett, 2007; see also Anti-Academies Alliance, n.d., Benn, 2011). Currently (late 2016) Only 35% of secondary schools are LA run. 30% are in a multi-academy trust, 29% stand-alone converted academies and 5% are free and studio schools and UTCs. Most primary schools continue to be LA run (82%) (Edubase, 2016).

When the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition came into power in May 2010, there were just over 200 Academies. By 2015, over half of England's State secondary schools were Academies. As of June 2015, there were 4,676 Academies open in England. There are hundreds more in the pipeline (BBC News, 2015). Since the Conservatives came to power in 2010, they have 'given away over 3,000 schools to unaccountable private sector interests for free. That is over £10 billion (\$16.4 billion

USD) of publicly owned property given away for free to unaccountable pseudo-charities, several of them operated by Conservative Party donors' (Clarke, 2014). Following the election of a majority Conservative Party government in the 7 May 2015 general election in the UK, replacing the previous Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government of 2010-2015, the Conservative government announced plans to considerably extend the number of Academy Schools, up to 1,000 schools judged 'inadequate' by the school inspections body, Ofsted, and to abolish the right of parents, teacher and local communities to be involved in the decision-making process. The new law would force councils and governing bodies to convert struggling schools into Academies (Vaughan, 2015). However, proposed legislation to require all schools to become Academies by 2022, was shelved after opposition, including from some Conservative LAs who saw no need for schools under their control to be taken out of Local Authority control (Adams, 2016).

Such policies of Academisation continually fail to ensure that educational needs are everywhere met. Even in the matter of the provision of school places, the neo-liberal approach cannot guarantee adequate supply. The National Audit Office predicted a shortfall in school-places of 256,000 by 2014-15, rising to perhaps 440,000 at the end of the decade (NAO, 2013, p7). The vast majority of this shortfall will manifest itself in the primary phase, where classroom-overcrowding is already significant.

### ***Sponsors, Governance and Control of Academies***

Some 'philanthropists' have brought controversy with their sponsorship. One such is Peter Vardy, millionaire car dealer and evangelical Christian. He established the Emmanuel Schools Foundation to manage his education interests, including Academies. The teaching of creationism in the Doncaster Academy hit the newspaper headlines as well as another Principal's attitude to homosexuality: "The bible says clearly that homosexual activity is against God's design. I would indicate that to young folk", said Nigel McQuoid, headteacher of Kings Academy, Middlesbrough, a part of the Vardy Chain (Adams, 2005). In 2007 a Vardy Academy was in the press again, when a teacher, himself a Methodist lay preacher, reported to the local newspaper in Teesside that an interview at the Academy had been more about theology than teaching. He reported being asked if he believed in Noah's Ark (National Secular Society, 2007).

Other millionaires have sponsored Academies: the world's biggest conference organiser, Lord Irvine Laidlaw; property magnate, car importer and scientologist, Bob Edmiston, Roger de Haan, of Saga holidays, and Lord Harris of Peckham, the carpet magnate, who sponsors a chain of Academies, based in south London.

A number of Academies have used the language of Thatcher's notorious homophobia when drawing up policies to do with the teaching of Sex and Relationships, so that such policies prohibit the 'promotion' of homosexuality (Morgan, 2013). As *Gaystar News* reports, 'many more UK schools are found to have banned even the discussion of sexuality in schools, an echo of the Thatcher government's 1988 'Clause 28' of the Local Government Act which made it illegal to 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship". The Act was repealed in 2003. *Gay Star News* revealed in 2013 that Academies are using Sex and Relationships Education policies to ban the promotion of homosexuality (Morgan, 2013).

### ***Not Quite Fraud- But Private Edu-Businesses/ Academy Chains Milking the System***

There has been long-standing concern that Academies are employing the services of companies linked to their sponsors. This was exposed for example in August 2004, when the *Times Education Supplement* (TES) reported that West London Academy had spent £180,964 for training and personnel services to businesses and a charity linked to its sponsor, Alec Reed of Reed Executive Plc. £290,214 had also been paid by King's Academy to organisations linked to Peter Vardy for marketing, recruitment and educational advice. There was no evidence that contracts had been put out to tender or three quotes obtained as required in community schools and by European Union regulations. In 2007 it was reported that Bob Edmiston's Grace Foundation had awarded three contracts worth £281,000 over two years for payroll and management services for the Grace Academy, to the IM group, owned by Edmiston. It also paid £53,000 for management services to his foundation, Christian Vision.

More recently a 2016 expose revealed the wide-scale abuse of freedoms that enabled individuals to award themselves contracts for profits (Channel 4, 2016). Because UK law prohibits schools (as registered charities) to make profit for stake/shareholders, private companies who sponsor schools will use their autonomy to award themselves contracts for auxiliary services (cooking, cleaning, catering, maintenance and so forth). This is tax-payers' monies being siphoned into the pockets of CEO and shareholders. The expose revealed that more than £14 billion of public money now flows directly to Academy Trusts. Here are some of the headlines from investigating 100 Academy Trusts:

- The chief executive of another Trust spent almost £1000 on hotel bills, including a £245 stay at a luxury golf resort in Cheshire
- The executive principal of a Trust spent more than £1400 on two hotel bills including £909 at the Park Plaza in London
- One Trust pays a monthly Broadband bill for executive principal's home in France

Research by Dispatches shows that largest 40 Academy Trusts have spent more than £1m of public money on executive expenses since 2012.

It went on to report on Ian Cleland of the Academy Transformation Trust in Birmingham, which runs 22 schools. It said:

Mr Cleland is paid £180,000 per year. The Academy's expenses reveal that he spent £3,000 on first-class travel and over £1,000 on restaurant bills. The Trust also pays for the use of his XJ Premium Luxury V6 Jaguar car including around £3000 on items like new tyres, a vehicle health check and insurance for himself and his wife. His expenses include a meal at Marco Pierre White totalling £471 (Channel 4, 2016).

It is noteworthy that this is tax-payers' monies being used, and secondly that this information could only be revealed after a freedom of information request was submitted. It is evident that self-interest accompanies freedoms and deregulation. Ultimately the *raison d'être* of a private company and a CEO is to maximise profit, and this is at odds with the purpose of a public schooling system.

The sponsors of Academies have grown significantly. Oasis Learning grew from a £3 million concern in 2006 to £70 million in 2010, while Absolute Return for Kids (ARK) Academy chain reached £117.5 million from the same £3 million starting point. The chains require an extra layer of often highly paid management. Bruce Liddington of E-ACT was paid a salary of £265,000 with an infamous expense account, exposed by whistleblowers in April 2010. (Shepherd, 2011). Multinational consulting and business companies, like Mouchel, provided services for Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and have interests in school buildings, ICT, back offices functions and managing Academies.

Academy schools, such as those run by the E-Act chain, which runs 35 schools, are characterized by “extravagant expenses claims, first-class rail travel and ‘a culture of prestige venues’ for meeting” (Clarke, 2014). A high-profile example is Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) which pays six figure salaries to 20 of their staff, paying some of them more than the British prime minister, and salaries far in excess of those in the State non-Academy sector, and “which has been procuring ‘services’ from their own directors and trustees to the tune of half a million pounds, none of the contracts agreed under competitive tender” (Clarke, 2014).

Syal (2014) comments that ‘taxpayer-funded Academy chains have paid millions of pounds into the private businesses of directors, trustees and their relatives, documents obtained from freedom of information requests show.’ To take one example, in July 2013 England's ‘largest taxpayer funded chain, the Academy Enterprise Trust, came



under fire following revelations of almost £500,000 worth of payments made to private businesses owned by its trustees and executive' (Syal, 2014). A more recent example (Weale, 2015) is that of Sir Greg Martin, 'superhead' of the Durand Academy in Southwell, who 'faced questions about his earnings, alleged to be more than £400,000, made up of his head's salary plus income from a firm called GMG, which runs the London Horizons leisure facilities on the Stockwell school site'. An update to these scandals regarding Academy 'Superheads' (Vaughan, 2016b) details the withdrawal of government support from, dismissals of, and imprisonment of various 'superheads'.

### ***The (Lack of Evidence about) Effectiveness of Academies for Students***

At the end of January 2015, a cross party House of Commons education select committee report found no evidence that Academies raise standards, either for disadvantaged students, or overall (Weale, 2015; NUT, 2015). A recent NAO report (2014) evaluated the Academies programme as follows: 'The Department for Education has not demonstrated the effectiveness of the different interventions it and others make in underperforming maintained schools and Academies', The House of Commons Select Committee on Education's report of January 2015 (Weale, 2015) said that 'although it was clear that Academisation led to greater competition which helped drive improvement in schools, there was not yet proof that Academies raised standards either for disadvantaged children or overall' and 'called on the government to stop exaggerating the success of Academies'.

Less than a week after the NAO report, the then Education secretary, Nicky Morgan, announced a new, punitive policy in her self-proclaimed war on illiteracy and innumeracy. Primary schools in England with a percentage of eleven year olds who fail to pass times tables and writing tests would be forced to become Academies (Adams, 2015). With no evidence that Academy status will lead to improvements for pupils, it would appear that the only perceived benefit of this punitive policy is to promote neo-liberal ideology. And, following his re-election as Prime Minister of a majority Conservative government, David Cameron announced his belief that 'every school should become an Academy' (BBC Education, 2015). Legislation to this end remains part of government policy, despite strong opposition. This is despite a more recent report (Andrews and Perera, 2016), that has again made clear that Academies make no difference in the longer run to the attainment of pupils. An initial uptick in attainment in the year prior to Academisation, sustained in the year of conversion, dwindles thereafter, until after four years GCSE performance is back to the level it was two years before conversion. Government policy is ideologically driven rather than fact-based.

### **Reduction in Public Expenditure on Education**

There is also the reduction in real levels of funding for the education service. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2016) reports that 'school spending per pupil is likely to fall by around 8% in real terms (based on a school specific measure of inflation) between 2014-15 and 2019-20' (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2016), which is on top of cuts estimated by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Chowdry and Sibieta, 2011) of 4% estimated for the duration of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government of 2010-2015 (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2011). The introduction of tuition fees has placed a large part of the cost of higher education on the shoulders of students, reducing the cost to the government.

### **PART THREE: The Neo-Conservative Revolution *in Education in England and its Impacts***

The Education System in England has not just been neo-liberalised, it has also been conservatised. Aspects of Neo-conservatisation are:

1. The conservatisation of curriculum and exams
2. The increased social class based stratification and hierarchicalisation of education provision at school and university levels as evidenced by the increase in various forms of 'selection' of pupils/ students, and as 'enforced' by SATs results/ HighStakes Testing, by League Tables of 'winners and losers' in a competitive market.
3. The controlling of teachers in schools, further education colleges and universities, as evidenced in the testimonies of three teachers in Part Three, by surveillance, by the intensification of teachers' labour, and by the newly introduced Performance Related Pay, to an extent individualising pay negotiations away from nationally determined pay.

### **Curriculum and Exams**

Despite the several revisions to it undertaken since its inception at the end of the 1980s, the National Curriculum for State-schools remains quite rigid, and remains a conservative curriculum. It was never a 'National' curriculum, since private schools were always exempt from its provision.

Margaret Thatcher herself looked at some of the original curriculum proposals presented by the hand-picked Conservative subject committees and rejected them as 'too liberal'. As one of us have written elsewhere (Hill, 1997) she personally changed the curriculum. That represents an element of State control, control of the free market,

and an example of where neo-liberalism, 'free choice', is accompanied by State supervision/ control.

Regarding curriculum content in Britain in 2014, the centenary of the start of the First World War, the neoconservative (and neo-liberal) the then secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, attempted to insist that schoolchildren be taught that the war was a grand patriotic war fought to "protect little Belgium" from German aggression. He decried the anti-war sentiments of television programs such as *Blackadder* and films such as *Oh What a Lovely War* that showed the war as senseless slaughter resulting from a quarrel between the ruling families of Europe, tied in with a clash of imperialisms and imperialist expansionism, particularly in Africa (Shipman, 2014). Former Secretary of State for Education (2010-2014), Michael Gove, was vocal in his belief that education is one of the hallmarks of a civilised society, binding society together whilst allowing individuals to write their own life story (Gove, 2009). An unproblematic, and somewhat unexceptional belief, until he propounded his ideas on what the education system should look like in order to deliver these aims. His vision was based on his personal experience of, and regard for, a traditional, subject-based, rigorous grammar school education.

The injustice perpetrated by the tripartite system was, at least, transparent. Today's complex tangle of Academies, community schools, foundation schools, grammar schools and free schools obscures the ongoing injustice of a traditional, subject-based curriculum which overtly offers social mobility, whilst covertly reinforcing the status quo.

Since summer 2014, the then Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, continued with his promotion of a traditional, subject-based curriculum and has reiterated Gove's pronouncement, shortly before he left office, that children should be taught "British values". Her successor in office, Justine Greening, looks set to do likewise.

## **Selection and Hierarchy**

### ***Covert Selection***

There are a number of reports, such as Walker (2013) that describe the forms of covert selection used by Academy schools in their pursuit of getting a 'higher quality' intake of students. The programme has been radically expanded via the Academies Act 2010 (rushed through *The House of Lords* by the Education Secretary using emergency powers)

Academies were also exempted from a requirement to teach the National Curriculum, and from adhering to national pay and conditions legislation for staff. The premise was that injecting competition will improve standards.

Following the necessary changes to primary legislation (which a re-elected Conservative government can easily put forward following its majority win at the May 2015 general election) at the stroke of the Ministerial pen such schools could become fully independent, fully-private schools, offered for sale on the market as assets comprising buildings, land, facilities, staff and clients. One model for this is the USA where some Academy-style Charter schools—still supposedly State schools—are run ‘for profit’ by multinational and national-capital companies.

The Conservative governments in Britain, those of Thatcher (1979–1990) and of John Major (1990–1997), introduced and extended what they termed “school choice,” or, more specifically, “parental choice.” However, in such systems it is not the parents who choose; it is the (more prestigious, high-attaining) schools that choose the children/students, the “preferred” children/students being those with high test scores and “acceptable” (high status, “middle class”) cultural capital (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Gillborn & Youdell, 2002; Sellgren, 2013; Weekes-Bernard, 2007). This has led to considerably increased hierarchy and elitism within the State education system, elitism that is social class based and also based on ethnicity (Weekes-Bernard, 2007).

This leads to much increased hierarchy and elitism within the State education system, elitism that is “raced” and social class based. The Academies Commission Report of January 2013, *Unleashing Greatness* (Academies Commission, 2013), says it has received numerous submissions suggesting that “Academies are finding methods to select covertly,” that some Academies may covertly select pupils by using extra information on families or holding social events with prospective parents (Sellgren, 2013). The report says it has received evidence that some popular schools, including Academies, attempt to select and exclude pupils—despite the fact that the government admissions code says that schools cannot interview children or parents or give priority to children whose parents offer financial or practical support (Sellgren, 2013).

### ***Overt Selection and the Return of the Grammar Schools***

The Conservative government under Cameron moved to expand direct selection within the system by approving the opening a grammar-school 'annexe' in Kent. The 'annexe' was some ten miles away from its 'parent' school; in essence, a new entity. The previous New Labour administration had legislated to prevent more selection (though not to abolish it), necessitating recourse in this case to the subterfuge of an 'annexe'.

Under the new (from July 2016) Prime Minister Theresa May, the government looks set to try to find further ways to expand selection and entrench elitism. Their ideal vision, as proposed in the 2016 Green Paper, (Vaughan, 2016a) is to label children as high achievers in so-called 'good schools', who would then go to the linked prestigious university that sponsors that schools. Conversely, if a child attends just a satisfactory school, then that child is likely destined for a university that is deemed to be inferior. In the worse scenario for elitism, a child would attend a feeder prep-school for a prestigious fee-paying private school, and that school itself would be sponsored by a prestigious university, whose graduates are destined for the most exalted jobs in society. The point is that children are tracked at the age of 4, when feeder schooling begins. This elitist education is class based with the cost spiralling £500,000.

On the other side is schooling for the working class (including the less-affluent middles class), who lack the finances and/or the cultural capital to play the game of educational roulette, where there are only winners and losers. The vision of the Conservative Party is clear, start to differentiate and track children as early as possible by creating a parallel education system from the age 4 through to university. It needs noting that in the UK, 93% of school students attend State schools, with 7% attending private schools.

### **Controlling Teachers: the attack on Education Workers' Rights and Contracts.**

#### ***Teachers in Schools and Colleges: Pay, Conditions and Performance Related Pay***

The Education Secretary (2010-2014) Michael Gove put his department on what he himself described to *The Times* newspaper in December 2012 as 'a war footing' (Grimston and Griffiths, 2012). He maintained a pay-policy which resulted in a pay-cut of 13% in real terms over three years. He also significantly increased required pension-contributions. He goaded teachers' union leaders, calling them ideologically-driven and out-of-touch with their members, and advanced plans for regional, as opposed to national pay scales. From Sept 2013 teacher pay increases and progression up the pay spine has been dependent on headteacher appraisals, with all the scope this allows for injustices.

Related to the latter, since September 2013 teachers' pay has been linked to performance, 'Performance Related Pay' ( PRP). The removal of national, standardised and predictable pay-increase pay scales will further demoralize teachers, with payment by result being seen as essentially de-professionalising the profession. It will inevitably mean that teachers will be more coerced to teach to the test, neglecting the real focus, which should be learning and teaching of children. Christine Blower,

the then General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers' union, denounced the reform (National Union of Teachers, 2013) arguing that,

PRP is increasingly discredited elsewhere as a means of motivating employees and there has never been any evidence that it motivates teachers or improves their performance. These changes could deter graduates from entering teaching, restrict serving teachers' ability to move jobs and cause many to leave teaching if they are unfairly deprived of pay progression by decisions which ignore their contribution to their school but focus instead on funding pressure or whether the teacher's face fits.

Stevenson (2007) is one of many analysts (see also, Lewis, Hill and Fawcett, 2009) who notes that,

A key feature of current school-sector reform in England is the restructuring of teachers' work and the increased use of support staff to undertake a range of activities previously undertaken by teachers. Supporters speak of a new teacher professionalism focused on the "core task" of teaching. Critics fear deprofessionalisation through a process of deskilling, work intensification, and labor substitution.

### ***Pay and Conditions in Academies***

Academies are free to employ staff on their own pay rates and conditions of service. Although regulations provide some protection for staff transferring from Local Authority schools to Academies, new staff can be employed on inferior conditions. In 2007, a TUC report suggested that competition for teachers was preventing major deviation from national agreements. It referred to Ofsted, which suggested that in a number of Academies high levels of staff turnover had resulted in the recruitment of large numbers of newly qualified staff. It also said that staff were experiencing a loss of autonomy. Both these impacts are noted in the testimonies of the three teachers, which concludes this chapter.

PWC reported in 2008 that Academies employ more teachers without qualified teacher status (12 per cent) than community schools (five per cent). This was despite the fact that funding agreements for their sample required teachers to be qualified; something that they no longer do. In 2007 the National Audit Office (NAO) noted that Academies find it hard to retain good teachers. The (now abolished) General Teaching Council (GTC) expressed concerns that teachers at Academies did not have to register with it. This meant that a teacher banned for misconduct could be employed by an Academy. After concerted lobbying, it was agreed that Academy teachers should register with the GTC, but this only applied to new appointments. The coalition government abolished the GTC and central government took on the role of regulator. There were also reports of staff being asked to sign gagging clauses in contracts, which stopped them talking about Academy decisions or questioning them. The NAO noted that there is an emphasis

in Academies on strong and heroic leadership. This has led to inflation in salaries with Principals earning between £18,000 and £32,000 more than headteachers in Local Authority schools. In 2015 the Chief Executive Officer of the Harris Federation was paid £395,000 per year; that of the AET, £225,000 per year. Support staff are even more vulnerable than teachers as their terms and conditions are Local Authority based with no national grades. When schools have become Academies there has been a need to start at square one with negotiations on terms and conditions for new staff and some conditions of service, such as sick pay, have worsened significantly.

#### **PART FOUR: Teachers' Testimonies: Teachers' Lives in School: Managerialism, Surveillance, Control and Despair**

In this section, we present three testimonies about the impacts of neo-liberalism/ neo-conservatism, two from the school sector, one from the further/ vocational education sector, as a means of describing, analysing, and then theorising the reaches and impacts of the neo-liberal/ neoconservative restructuring of education.

Stevenson describes a relentless drive to raise productivity, teachers have often found themselves the victims of unwelcome change in which they have had their professional judgment curtailed, witnessed the increasing managerialisation of the educational process, and been subjected to ever more forensic scrutiny of their work by external agencies (Ball, 2003).

These developments have inevitably affected the work pressures on teachers and resulted in an intensification of the labor process of teaching' ... '(Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2000)'.

The view of one teacher, James, (cited in Hill, 2013c) view is that:

It seems to me the ability (time/insight) to inspire is taken up with filling in tracking data, data in-putting, filling in spreadsheets when homework has been set, making sure your room is not untidy for fear of senior management noticing and 'having a word'. The extra work that teachers now have to do has very little to do with the delivery of lessons, but ticking the boxes which senior management feel they should have ticked, in case Ofsted come calling. There is a lot of talk among heads of department about 'how can we show this?' and 'where's our evidence for that?', and as a result, we don't hear as much of 'I think I'm going to try this with that group of students'.

This view exemplifies research carried out by McBeath in 1999 (p.50), not long after the National Curriculum and its testing and surveillance regime came into operation. McBeath quotes a student teacher as saying "I used to feel that this school cared about how well I was doing. Now I just think it cares about how well *it's* doing."

James continues,

I'm not suggesting that as teachers we are not accountable for students' attainment in our lessons, but there is a limit on our ability to be accountable, and certainly a limit on how that accountability is tracked; lesson plans, intervention documentation by teachers— what have you done about student x, y and z? Why are they still failing?! Documentation on each student, and each aspect of a student accounted for on your lesson plan (such as average reading age; SEN status; Gifted and Talented status; preferred learning style (VAK), learning goal; current grade.

James talks not just of the intensification of accountability, but of a managerial culture of control and fear:

The voices of the Unions are quieter than they once were in schools, there are still those brave enough to speak out on behalf of those who must not be named to senior management, even though they do ask 'and who thinks that?' but more recently it has had to be a case of safety in large numbers. We had a Joint Union meeting of the NUT (National Union of Teachers) and NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters/ Union of Women Teachers) where we agreed on 'work to rule' principles the unions had set out, but the added pressures being placed on staff meant that we signed a petition. One member of staff set it up, and had to guarantee at least 60 signatures before he would show it to the head. Staff feel they can be got rid of so easily now. Having spoken to a Union leader in the school, she said staff are just too afraid to speak out now, because they know that if senior management want rid of you, they can do it now.

Senior management can observe you with their performance management duties (in some schools this may be once a year, in this, once every term). There are the 'learning walks' where they can 'pop into' your lesson (for however long they choose—this may have a different label, but it has the same effect on their view of your teaching, and your anxiety levels). There are also 'book looks', which have always been done, but now they must be standardised (making sure there are comments on how students can improve, and asking a 'Learning Development Question', which the students must answer. This is to tick another box in case Ofsted arrive). And the over-riding view of the reasons for many of these quality initiatives, is that if Management want you out, they will force you out with the amount of pressure they will place on you from the observations, or you will slip up in an observation, which can then be used against you.

I was observed on a learning walk by a member of senior management, she came in as the class were doing an activity, there was music on in the background, I was sat at my desk looking over a student's book. The member of staff left after a few minutes. At the end of the day I received an email from my head of department, who had received an email from the senior management observer. It was a complaint that I hadn't got up and gone over to greet her at the door. She didn't see the reason why I was playing that music and so therefore thought it questionable. The fact I was sat at my desk also gave her cause for concern, especially as another member of staff had also seen me sat at my desk once



when they had walked past my classroom and looked inside through the window in the door.

This type of micro management is something you may expect from working in a cubicle in an office. How teachers relate to students, how they engage them, is being written out in a memo, so Ofsted can tick it off. (cited in Hill, 2013c)

A second testimony, selected because of its typicality, its representativeness, is from Helen, a teacher in an Academy who is at the beginning, and now, possibly ending, of a teaching career. In this testimony she highlights the 'fear culture', the surveillance, the micro-management and control under which she labours:

I have only been teaching for a few years and I have already had enough. I went into teaching with a passion for my subject and with excitement of knowing that I would take part in shaping the future. Instead, I am slowly burning out, with no time for family or friends, and losing the passion I first started off with. I think, no, I know, this is all because of the school that I work in.

Starting at the school as an NQT, I had already trained in two different schools, so I knew that each school had their own ethos. However I don't think anything could have prepared me for the school I am currently at. It is an academy a part of a very big learning trust, controlling more than two dozen schools The Academy Chain trains its own staff, in partnership with a local university.

The school that I work at is an 'outstanding school', with excellent teaching and learning practises in place that any teacher would be proud to work at. However all this comes at a great cost, with tons of bureaucracy which hinders our teaching and learning.

Every day is an inspection at the school, we have 'learning walks' every lesson by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), they patrol the school, entering into each classroom, twice a lesson if they are really eager. We are always told that these 'learning walks' are a way to help teachers and to manage students behaviour. This is certainly not the feeling that staff standing at the front of the class get. It undermines our authority in front of our students, puts in place a fear culture making us conform to the ideas of teaching that SLT have put in place. It certainly does not let you become the teacher that you trained to be, or the teacher that you think your students will benefit most from. Again we are assured that the learning walks are not to monitor teachers but to help us manage students.

I wonder if that also applies to the detailed lesson plans which we have to produce every lesson. The lesson plans which we need to make sure are clearly displayed for SLT to check on their learning walks. The lesson plan which no teacher ever looks at, because they spent the last two hours planning that lesson and so know exactly what is happening when and who needs what differentiated worksheet, because they are teachers that know their class and care about them. Yet we are still required to produce these pointless lesson plans for every lesson which takes up crucial planning and marking time, even though

OFSTED doesn't actually require them. And if you so happen to forget, or not have your lesson plan in full view, a cross goes on SLT's learning walk card which they carry around to intimidate teachers. Then you wait for the dreaded email asking you to fall back in place and produce lesson plans as required. At least OFSTED will be impressed.

Of course the Union representatives have certainly tried to put a stop to all of this, constantly meeting and discussing ways to improve our work environment. However this doesn't seem to be working especially after having a conversation with a member of SLT, who claimed that it was pointless to argue against the schools management as they would always win. His exact words were 'the union fights, but we always fight harder'. I didn't realise we were in a battle at the school, but it's certainly one which we and the union seem to be losing. It really is a shame that the union presence fails to exist, not because we don't want it to, but because we are constantly put back in line out of fear that we will be bullied out of a job.

As if the pressures of work and the thought of OFSTED coming in wasn't enough, we regularly have 'mock OFSTED' where we are put under immense pressure to perform outstandingly, have perfect lessons plans, and make sure that each book is marked perfectly. As a teacher, I thought this was a norm and that lessons were always planned well and books marked to check progress is being made. Do we really need to add the pressure of 'mock OFSTED' just to make sure that all boxes are ticked? Again, OFSTED will certainly be impressed.

The Academy Chain trains their own staff, they teach them to be the best that they can be. They tell them that this is teaching, that there is no time to be creative, but that they need to make sure that they are in line following every rule set in place. They teach them that teachers have no life, that work life balance is a thing of the past, and that in order to be the best teacher they must give up their time in order to create resources, make lesson plans and mark books. They teach them that as a teacher you can progress quickly as long as you give it all you have in the first year or two. Yet all these teachers actually learn is that they hate teaching, that they never expected to come into this culture, that the learning part of teaching isn't the most important, and that they will burn out quickly. They know no different, they do not know what it is like to be a part of a community, a school that does not frighten you to perform in order to get the pay rise which you are due.

Every start of term, we are introduced to a large number of new staff. This is not because we are an ever-growing school and require extra teachers, it is because staff turnover is extremely high. Staff give all that they have not realising that it is not sustainable, and burn out within a couple of years.

I am at that point in my career. I am not contemplating if I will hand in my notice, instead I am trying to decide the best time of the year to do so. I loved teaching; I had a passion for my subject, a love for kids, and finally was excited take part in shaping the future. It's just such a shame that this school has taken that away from me, turned education into a

business, and has forced me into leaving. Whether it's leaving this particular school, or teaching altogether, I have yet to decide.

### ***Neo-liberalism, Managerialism and Vocational/ Further Education colleges***

Further Education colleges exhibit neo-liberal policy and its impacts starkly. These colleges are working class institutions, staffed by working class people, teaching predominantly working class students. They have a much lower unit of funding per student than do schools or universities. They have 3 million students a year, twice as many 16 to 18 year olds as there are in schools, 100,000 14 -15 year olds, apprentices, and two million adults trying to upskill. They still deliver 85 per cent of Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and 68 per cent of foundation degrees. (Association of Colleges, 2015).

The following is a written report, previously unpublished, written in summer 2013 by two experienced further education teachers. It is included here because it encapsulates and highlights aspects of managerialisation and financialisation of education in England. The following is their experience and reflective analysis of what happened in one 'sixth form college' (state funded college for 16-19 year olds):

Once upon a time there was a happy team of people who worked hard, and enjoyed their jobs. They were teachers in a sixth form college. They were well qualified, enthusiastic, professional individuals who were keen for their students to do well. But all of this changed in 2005 when the principal of the Sixth Form College declared that a new college was to be established by himself and the principal of a local Further Education college. He was keen to emphasise that this was not a merger. He explained that 16 - 19 year olds in the area would benefit from a broader and more exciting curriculum, which in turn would lead to raised revenue. Higher quality buildings and resources would result in higher student numbers and the future of the college would be secured. Marketisation arrived uncompromisingly in our classrooms. 'Greater choice for the consumer, combined with raised standards through enforced competition' with other colleges. It quickly became apparent that we were obliged to value what we monitored rather than monitor what we valued.

Staff on the sixth form site were reassured that their sixth form contracts would be honoured and tutors from the FE college would enjoy enhanced pay and conditions. Life continued with small, almost imperceptible, changes for a year or two. Gradually, however, staff groups which had taken the lead on policy decisions were dispensed with, and consultation became a thing of the past. In-Service Education for teachers, professional development became a meaningless exercise organised by the college's HR (Human relations Department) with little or no reference to pedagogy or reality.

The greatest change occurred when a new principal was appointed. Standing before the college for the first time clad in shiny new pearls, the new Principal announced that the

college was a business, that the business interests of the college would determine and override all. The Principal soon demonstrated that never condescending to discuss the issues at staff meetings and preferred to hold so called 'Talk to the Top' sessions, during which staff comments, suggestions and questions were dismissed in an offensive and bullying manner. The Principal adopted the Thatcherite catchphrase from the 80s "There is no alternative" whenever anyone questioned the vision for the future being put over. Clearly a new era had arrived for the sixth form college.

A shiny new £ multi-million building was opened one Saturday morning but this event was overshadowed by dire rumours of massive debt, with its origins rooted in changes to funding and a subsequent mortgage which was proving difficult to re-pay. E mails from the Principal announced that a quarter of the staff would be sacked, even the staffroom biscuit ration would be cut. "There is no alternative!" the Principal insisted. Redundancies were announced. Staff who had dedicated years to the college were told they "had served their purpose" Staff were required to sign new contracts or be sacked. Salaries were cut by thousands -for it was the generosity of previous contracts, declared the new Principal, which had bankrupted the college -holiday entitlement cut by ten days, and although it may have been possible to climb higher on the incremental ladder, this would only happen after an immediate plummet in pay. The Unions tried to put forward an alternative but were told there wasn't one. A grim new future had begun for the college.

As the crisis deepened, one day it was suddenly announced that Ofsted was about to descend upon the college. Staff who were already losing sleep fearing for their jobs now faced the additional stress of an inspector in their classroom. During inspection week the Principal's tone softened: no more talk of the college being a business, 'Talk to the Top' sessions were suspended. The Principal spoke of sunshine and a glowing future for the college. No sooner had the inspectors left the building, then redundancies and an inferior contract once again moved to the top of the agenda.

Some staff decided they would not sign new contracts, and were told they would be dismissed without redundancy pay. Others opted quickly to take a modest package and get out while they could. Many staff felt that if they questioned or challenged the new policies and strategies, or suggested that the students' education would be harmed by them, their own jobs would be at risk. Some staff were not even allowed the dignity of serving out their full notice period, and were told three weeks before the beginning of the new academic year that they would not be required in September.

The promised land of equality and diversity became a distant dream. Marketisation reared its ugly head through formula funding (another ERA reform) and the happy band of teachers was no longer able to contribute to the profession they had loved so much. More than two dozen staff left the college unable and unwilling to face the bleak new future. These staff were unacknowledged in end of term ceremonies. More than two dozen staff stripped of what they did best. Many more were made compulsorily redundant, unable to return even if they wanted to. As jobless staff left the shiny new building for the last time, the new management announced a party to celebrate the "achievements" of the old

management. The new Principal announced her sorrow at how things at turned out for the staff, but there really was no alternative, for business is business.

### **Resistance to Neo-liberal/ Neoconservative Education Policy**

Resistance is widespread- to Selection (for example the September 2016 Grammar Schools proposals made by new Prime Minister Theresa May (BBC, 2016)), to Academisation, to Performance Related Pay for teachers, to the High-Stakes Testing regime in schools, to moves to privatisation in universities, to the imposition and extension of university fees in the (see, for example, Anti-Academies Alliance, nd; The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, nd; Hill, 2012; Canaan et al, 2013; Earl, 2015; Maisuria, 2014; Robertson and Hill, 2015 and the websites of trade unions such as the National Union of teachers (NUT), and UCU (The Universities and Colleges Union). In this article, we focus on the impacts and the ideological analysis of neo-liberal and neoconservative ideology and policy in England. Other articles, blogs, trade union and campaign websites show the resistance to these policies and ideologies.

With the election and re-election of Jeremy Corbyn in 2015 and 2016 to the leadership of the Labour Party, the Labour Party is now distancing itself far more from the neo-liberal and neoconservative policies of previous Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, Conservative, and New Labour policies. The current (Winter 2016) left-wing Education Spokesperson Angela Rayner, has, for example pledged to bring back Education Maintenance Allowances and also Maintenance Grants for university students from middle and low-income families (SchoolsWeek, 2016) and to bring back Academies under Local Authority oversight. She has for example said she wants 'to see academies made more accountable to local people by giving local councils a say and empowering parent governors' (Rayner, 2016), an intention also announced by Jeremy Corbyn (LabourList, 2015). Corbyn has announced his intention to abolish Student Tuition fees for university students,

As LabourList (2016) summarised,

Last summer, Jeremy Corbyn went beyond condemning the Conservatives' brutal cuts to further and adult education. Corbyn promises provision for lifelong learning, minimum wage equalisation to end poverty rates for apprentices, and integration, cooperation and democratic accountability across education. This is a stark departure from decades of Conservative (and New Labour) policies attempting to force education into an artificial market.

Significantly, Corbyn's pledge also includes universal public childcare – a policy that would both raise the prospects of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and remove barriers and burdens that disproportionately fall on women.

This parliamentarist politics, energised and supported and kept on track- and demanded by extra-parliamentary action- social movement, trade union, campaign groups- could potentially herald a counter-neo-liberal, counter-neoconservative education system. It also, whether elected to power or not, succeeds in challenging the hegemonic, dominant mantra and ideology of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism in English education.

### **Conclusion**

The three teachers' testimonies in this chapter testify to the impacts of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism on teachers in various sectors of education.

In this chapter, we have, for analytical purposes, separated neo-liberalism and its impacts on education from neo-conservatism and its impacts in education. They are, of course, while in tension, as Gamble pointed out in 1988 mutually supportive, the genius of Thatcherism (Gamble, 1988). And individual policies, such as Performance Related Pay for teachers both marketise and supervise/ control. There is enforcement of market discipline.

Ideologically the neo-liberal developments described, analysed and critiqued in this article can be interpreted as 'the businessification' of education, the softening up, the preparation for the wholesale privatisation of schools, vocational colleges / Further Education Colleges and Sixth Form Colleges, and universities – where the private sector is willing to do business, in other words it is business-led. This is not for the good of the commons but for self-interest and profit.

At the same time, the fist of neo-conservatism is establishing authoritarian control over curricula, teachers, and education institutions. Opposition is little tolerated. We have now, in England's education system- despite the resistance of teachers, education workers, parents, students and communities/ trade unions- what can be termed, 'Free Market Stalinism'.

The purpose and impacts of schooling and education are becoming more and more nakedly more clearly class-delineated and biased, with increased ('raced' and gendered) social class stratification in education provision and results. Schooling and education are more and more geared to the extraction of direct and indirect profit, and the production of socially quiescent, hierarchically tiered and rewarded labour power-education for human capital, education for capitalism.

## Notes

(1) This article is a development of the chapter written in September 2013, and published as Hill, D., Lewis, C., Maisuria, A. and Yarker, P. (2013) *Capitalism and Education in Britain*. In D. Hill (ed.) *Immiseration Capitalism and Education: Austerity, Resistance and Revolt*, Brighton: Institute for Education Policy Studies, pp.53-72, and Hill, D., Lewis, C., Maisuria, A., Yarker, P., and Carr, J. (2015).

(2) In the 2015 General (Parliamentary) Election of 2015 one of us, Dave Hill, was a candidate, in Hove and Portslade, for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) (VoteDaveHillFacebook, 2015).

(3) One of us (Dave Hill) benefited from a similar scheme in the 1960s; forty-five years later one of Dave Hill's grandsons received an EMA, 2006–2009.

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