



Meeting with Tristram Hunt, Shadow Secretary of State for Education on Tuesday 21 January 2014

Room B, 1 Parliament Street, Westminster, London

Representing f40: Ivan Ould (Chair of f40); Nic Dakin MP, Vice Chair of f40; Gillian Hayward; Margaret Judd and Stewart King, Executive Committee members and Doug Allan (Secretary to f40).

This meeting was facilitated by Nic Dakin and he thanked the Shadow Secretary for agreeing to meet with f40. He outlined why he was involved in f40's campaign and invited Ivan Ould to introduce the f40 representatives.

Ivan Ould gave a short introduction to the background to f40's campaign on school funding, the timeframe over which the campaign for fair funding has been staged, the recognition of f40's argument by the Coalition Government and the anticipated consultation on a set of proposals for a new national funding formula.

Stewart King explained how the group had developed its own proposals "Towards a National Funding Formula for Schools; the f40 Perspective", which has been presented to the School Minister David Laws in September 2013 and had subsequently been the subject of several meetings with officials from the Education Funding Team in the DfE. He explained that the working links between f40 and the DfE had been very good and it was anticipated that many of f40's views would be clearly identifiable in the forthcoming consultation and subsequent new formula, which we anticipate will be in place for 2016-17.

The f40 representatives expressed concern that the three-month consultation had still not been launched: it had been anticipated in December and is still awaited. However, and despite suggestions from certain quarters to the contrary, f40 believes it will be launched within the coming weeks once inter-departmental differences are settled. There is a clear and recognised need for change and it would be extremely unfortunate if this opportunity to put right a long-standing wrong is missed.

Like the government, f40 would wish to see the introduction on a national funding formula. There are some big questions around how it would best work, including the most appropriate arrangements for local discretion, managing the winners and losers, agreeing the period of transition and managing the anticipated turbulence that any change will bring.

The Shadow Secretary suggested that the Coalition will be having real difficulty getting agreement on how best to proceed and he said he could imagine the pressure being applied from other interest groups, particularly those that will lose out under any fairer funding arrangement.

There was a conversation concerning Pupil Premium and how it has impacted on LAs in general and f40 LAs in particular. Ivan Ould said that f40 had obviously welcomed to introduction of new funding into education, but he is concerned that the policy has not assisted all areas, schools and pupils in the intended way. It has not been the panacea predicted. In many areas it has made the financial difference between schools much worse,

increasing the gap in funding. If you are just above the threshold it can cause great resentment.

Ivan Ould referred to the general budget difficulties that all LAs are experiencing and highlighted the fact that f40 LAs tend to have greater difficulties than others. The Shadow Secretary said that he and his colleagues in the Labour Party are very much aware of the pain being felt in local authorities as a consequence of budget cuts.

Gillian Hayward referred to the position of academies, stating that their funding is linked to local authority arrangements – so they are in the same boat if their LA is one that is poorly funded. She described the financial differences that exist between Gloucestershire schools – both maintained and academy – and better funded schools in other areas. The differences can be very substantial.

The Shadow Secretary asked for an explanation of the “Lump Sum” element of the funding package and Stewart King explained how it is part of the general formula package to cover fixed costs.

Margaret Judd said that momentum at this stage is crucially important to f40. It would be incredibly disappointing if current expectations were dashed or if the next government failed to implement the required fair funding changes.

Ivan Ould referred to f40’s forthcoming conference – “A National Funding Formula for Schools”, which is being staged in Room 14 at the Palace of Westminster on Thursday 6 February 2014. He indicated that over 120 people, including around 30 MPs had indicated they will attend. The Shadow Secretary said he hoped the event goes well but he has an appointment elsewhere in the country that day so will not be able to attend

In drawing the meeting to a close, the Shadow Secretary explained that he is very interested in the case put forward by f40. He suggested that the Labour Party had commenced detailed consideration of its position on education issues in general. This would obviously embrace school funding. He also indicated that he would be meeting School Minister David Laws that evening and he would raise fair funding with him.

The Shadow Secretary thanked f40 for taking the time to explain their position. He suggested that his colleague Nic Dakin would ensure the door to his office was always open and he looked forward to further meetings in the future.

End

DA/f40/21 Jan 13