



EDUCATION

Life Long Learning

Critical to the health and future of any community is the education of its citizens. United Future promotes policy to enable universal access to all levels of education. We must ensure that qualifications are robust and well respected and that both the country as a whole and the individual gets value for their commitment to learning from early childhood and beyond.

Progression levels:

- Early childhood
- Primary school
- Middle schooling
- Secondary school
- Tertiary education

Key Issues:

- Effective teaching
- Engaging parents & community
- Effective school leadership & governance
- Relevant curriculum
- Funding and achievement
- Creating a safe learning environment
- Boys education
- Special education
- Correspondence School
- Adult community and continuing education

Early Childhood Education

United**Future** believes that parents have the primary responsibility for their child's education. Parents are the drivers of their children's education, implicitly and explicitly and we want to support them in this role, by giving them the skills to be their child's first teacher, and to ensure that the family home environment values education and supports educational aspirations. It also means we will allow parents, and not the government, to choose the most appropriate provider of pre-school education for their child.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Support the concept of parents as first teachers and encourage the expansion of programmes like PAFT and HIPPY to families other than those deemed to be at-risk.
- Endorse the role of parent-led early childhood education centres to empower parents to lead their children's education and encourage the parent-child bond.
- Support the idea that 3 and 4 year olds should have 20 hours (or part thereof) early childhood education per week heavily subsidised, where it will make early childhood education and care more affordable for families and/or improves children's learning. United**Future** will include Play-centre, Kōhanga Reo and Pacific Language nests in this policy as well as teacher-led centres for the same reasons.
- Promote an increase of funding for early identification of children with special needs and disabilities with targeted systematic, intensive and high quality interventions.
- Ensure that government funding of early childhood centres is reflected in the fees passed on to parents by requiring them to disclose what proportion of fees, are taxpayer-funded.
- Support lifting the qualifications of early childhood caregivers, but relax the government's target for all staff to be degree-qualified by 2012 for centres that provide all-day care as well as education, to allow them to employ support staff to supervise children when they are not actively engaged in learning.
- Pilot the use of early childhood education centres as contact points for family support services, such as parenting courses, budget advice, health and counselling services.
- Prioritise staff-to-child ratios for each age group as a condition of funding for early childhood education centres where applicable.
- Simplify with a view to reducing the quantity and complexity of compliance requirements that early childhood education and care providers must fulfil.

Primary Schooling

1. Assessment for Learning

The call for national standardized tests in Primary Schools is flawed in two ways. Firstly, it wrongly assumes that student progress is not currently assessed in a robust way and secondly, it is usually linked to the idea of measuring and comparing teachers and schools performance.

Teachers would be forced to teach to the test rather than teach to meet the needs of their students.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Support the widespread use of Asttle (Assessment Tools for Teaching & Learning) and ongoing development of tools like Asttle.
- Support the regular use in primary school of diagnostic pre-testing for literacy and numeracy as the basis for teaching, and support this information being made available to parents

2. Student Learning and Achievement

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Increase access to Reading Recovery.
- Set a minimum number of hours are established for the teaching of literacy and numeracy.
- Endorse intentions to drop the teacher/pupil ration for Year 1 Students to 1:15, and recommend that Years 2 & 3 be progressively dropped to 1:22 and Years 4-8 progressively dropped to 1:25.

Middle Schooling

United**Future** supports the concept of "Middle Schooling" that targets years 7 – 10 students at both Intermediate and Secondary Schools.

"In the race to get kids to the finish line, let's not bypass their developmental needs" - Thomas Armstrong (Educational Leadership, May 2007)

Emerging adolescents are not always suited to learning in an environment that favours subject specialities on a 50 minute rotation with the consequential reduction in pastoral care. This risks disconnecting students. In the battle to ensure students stay meaningfully connected to school we believe a greater investment needs to be put into this age group.

We support many of the recommendations of the New Zealand Association of Middle Schools (NZAIMS) that there is ongoing investment and development of middle years schooling in New Zealand. We understand this to mean that:

- Teachers working in this sector need to be well qualified in subject areas, able to work across subjects and well qualified to meet the needs of emerging adolescents.
- Students in this age group are most at risk of disengaging from school than any other group and therefore need school to be as focussed on their developmental and affective needs as on their academic achievement.
- Parents often find this season of parenting one of the most challenging and so middle schooling needs to consider the additional stresses that often characterise the parent/child relationship.

Secondary Schooling

1. NCEA

NCEA allows students to build up credits over time towards a qualification. Students who do not gain a qualification in one year retain the credits they have gained and can add them to subsequent years.

United**Future** supports the use of NCEA while acknowledging areas of improvement still needed. The feedback we have received from educational professionals is that it covers a wider range of subjects and competencies than other qualifications, gives a better indication of a student's ability to succeed at university and is now the preferred system of NZ employers. It is accepted by tertiary institutions in NZ and internationally.

The setting and moderation of standards happens in an open and transparent way (students get back their marked papers). The results can tell anyone interested exactly what a student can do. Bright students do extremely well, while less able students have what they can do recognized.

United**Future** offers some specific, constructive solutions to the problems besetting NCEA.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Introduce a minimum number of standards for each subject that must be externally assessed.
- Engage in a public education campaign to ensure that parents, students and employers understand the NCEA system
- Look at initiatives to address the problem of boys continuing to fall behind girls in achievement and completion rates for NCEA
- Establish consistent policies on internal and external reassessment opportunities.
- Ensure that the time allotted to complete externally assessed exams is appropriate to the number of standards that students are sitting.
- Review the appropriateness of the three levels of achievement to consider a more graduated grading system.

2. Cambridge Exams

The Cambridge system is often liked by parents because it is almost identical to the system most parents would have experienced. Assessments are based on one three hour examination for each subject which means it is heavily reliant on rote learning skills. There is no requirement for an ongoing assessment of course work. It is narrower in the range of subjects on offer and is not preferred by top international universities. The marking system and moderation is not transparent. However students competitively motivated may do well with this assessment approach and there is some suggestion that boys may perform better with this curriculum.

3. Other Issues

United**Future** supports the raising of the school leaving age but only if it is accompanied by a range of options for students to use their years 12 and 13 for more career focused learning options like trade training and as long as students capable of moving on to tertiary opportunities during those years are not blocked from doing so.

Tertiary Education

United**Future** has proposed a bold new approach to tertiary education policy, which would see New Zealand as a nation that finally offers free education to its citizens from the age of 3 years old, right through to university and beyond.

We propose a zero-fees policy for tertiary education in New Zealand, accompanied by a push to increase the quality of tertiary education and protect the value of New Zealand degrees.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Ensure that entrance standards remain high for universities to keep universities competitive internationally.
- Encourage links and incentives between tertiary providers and industry to ensure that skills taught are relevant and required in the future labour market.
- Ensure that tertiary education instructors undergo a minimum amount of training in teaching, and require teaching performance to be monitored and included as a factor in promotion decisions.
- Ensure that degree courses are taught by staff actively engaged in relevant research.
- Require tertiary institutions to include policies on students with disabilities in their charters and to report on these annually.
- Ensure that the intent of the University Act is not diluted by external audit of compliance areas, especially in non relevant research.
- Provide a special EFTS category for tertiary students with disabilities, which recognises their needs and requirements, improving their access to further education.
- Promote greater awareness of the opportunities afforded by vocational training.
- Encourage all young people under 25 who are not at school to either be "earning or learning" (i.e. in some form of education/training or work) and support initiatives such as the Mayoral Taskforce for Jobs.
- Ensure that senior students have sufficient access to advice and information about career choices and opportunities for further education and training.

Student Support

It is United**Future** policy to:

- We propose a zero-fees policy for tertiary education in New Zealand, accompanied by a push to increase the quality of tertiary education and protect the value of New Zealand degrees.
- Under United**Future**'s policy, from January 2010, tertiary education fees will be free for New Zealanders whether they are learning part-time or fulltime at tertiary education institutions.
- Focus on quality so that more New Zealand universities are ranked in the top 100 universities in the world. Australia has 6 ranked in the top 50 – we only have one in the top 100 – and this needs to change.
- Ensure all tertiary students unable to find work over the summer period have access to the Emergency Unemployment Benefit.
- The current student loan repayment threshold is too low at just over \$18,000. United**Future** would increase the repayment level to the full-time (40 hours per week) minimum wage, which as of Jan 2009 would be \$25,000.

Effective Teaching

The recruitment, retention, capability and performance of teachers should be the foundation of a credible education policy. The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. The quality of teachers directly affects student performance more than anything else within the education system.

It is UnitedFuture policy to:

- Ensure that entry requirements to teacher education are rigorous.
- Oppose any moves to introduce Performance Pay as we see it as wrecking the collegial working environment currently enjoyed by teachers.
- Ensure that student teachers develop both the competencies and the disposition to work with children and young people and those non-performing student teachers are identified and if necessary failed.
- Clarify the protocols available to Principals for removing an incompetent teacher.
- Reject current calls for introducing National Standards in literacy and numeracy in Primary Schools as this policy assumes that teachers are not currently measuring students in these areas and that current measurements lack scientific robustness. This is just not true and is based in the politics of fear.
- Require schools to explain to parents how progress is measured, how often and for what purpose.
- Increase the amount of time student teachers spend in school-based practicum.
- Include mandatory course content on teaching children and adults with disabilities in all teacher education.
- Focus on improving working conditions that contribute to the decision teachers make to leave the profession like workload and student behaviour.
- Recognise that teaching is perceived as a stressful and underpaid job that is largely misunderstood and undervalued by the wider public.
- Support a review of teacher pay rates so that they reflect more accurately the additional management units and professional development undertaken and are internationally competitive.
- Support professional standards that are descriptive rather than prescriptive. To anchor teachers to narrowly measured standards is likely to be counter-productive in a fast-changing information age. Teachers should be able to demonstrate that they are committed to ongoing personal professional development.
- Strengthen current professional development priorities specifically in assessment practice, classroom management, subject expertise, meeting the needs of disabled students and the ongoing roll out of Te Kōtahitanga.
- Ensure that support for newly qualified teachers across all sectors is consistent and of a high standard.
- Encourage more men to join the teaching profession at all levels.
- Recruit more Maori and Pacific teachers.
- Support the inclusion of teacher trainees in a bonding scheme to reduce student loan debt for those who are qualified in fields facing shortages, in return for a continuous period of work in New Zealand after graduation.
- Support the call from Principals for the Teachers Council to deal with disciplinary matters in a more transparent manner.

Engaging Parents and Community

We now understand far better that learning takes place everywhere, and the more we involve parents and the community in the learning process the better.

Research shows that families and whānau who monitor their children's progress at school are more likely to have children who are successful learners.

Parents increasingly want choice and United**Future** believes that within the NZ context some of that choice could well be offered within a school campus rather than just the traditional choices between state, integrated and private school options.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Develop a web site to inform parents about the characteristics, facilities and performance of all New Zealand schools.
- Pilot programmes aimed at increasing parent involvement in schools literacy programmes.
- Target Maori and Pacific Communities for closer involvement in school life and student learning to improve achievement rates.
- Provide additional support for schools catering for extremely diverse communities to engage better with those diverse groups. Often schools positioned in the middle of the decile rankings are the most in need of this support.
- Allow parents to apply for a subsidy/tax relief if they have secured out-of school tuition for their children as a means of improving achievement in literacy or numeracy where this has been identified by the school as a need.

Effective School Leadership and Governance

School Leadership is a critical factor in determining the tone and effectiveness of schools. School Principals and their senior staff oversee curriculum delivery, assessment, the professional development of staff, timetabling, reporting to parents and the wider community, the pastoral care of students and much more.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Assess whether the same governance structure for schools as small as 9 students in remote rural locations as for large schools of over 2000 students despite widely varying needs and pools of potential trustees is appropriate.
- Review the role of school Boards of Trustees, specifically succession planning, training, financial management, recruitment and retention, professional appointments, the development of special school characteristics and issues identified by managers during a statutory intervention.
- Introduce more management units into Primary schools to reflect the additional responsibilities beyond the walls of their classroom that many teachers carry out. This will also help develop leadership skills amongst teachers.
- Improve professional development for school leaders.

Relevant Curriculum

United**Future** supports the new curriculum believing that it represents a necessary response to the fact that “there has been no slowing of the pace of social change. Our population has become increasingly diverse, technologies are more sophisticated, and the demands of the workplace are more complex”. (Curriculum document).

“Today we are preparing students for things we don’t yet know about” (Prof Brent Davis University of Columbia Canada author of “Engaging Minds: Changing Teaching in complex times”).

Success in the future is going to require people to be more adaptable to change both personally and collectively, the ability to problem solve collaboratively, while being self-organising will be vital.

United**Future** has identified two areas that we believe fit within the new framework and that we would like to see emphasised more deliberately in the immediate future.

1. Character Education - Life-Skills

Character Education is about incorporating universal values such as honesty, respect for others and the law, tolerance, fairness, caring and social responsibility into a schools culture. Character education programmes, also known as values education and life-skills education are established in full consultation with parents and staff and are currently operating in about 52% of New Zealand Schools.

Schools deliberately implementing these programmes report measurable improvements in staff retention, a reduction in playground bullying, improved classroom behaviour, and fewer stand downs of students.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Ensure that all schools implement an integrated character education programme.
- Ensure that Years 7 – 13 take an integrated approach to life skills by establishing it as a separate subject, to include segments on career planning, health, sexuality and relationships, drugs, budgeting advice, civics education, parenting skills, and driver education.

2. Oral Language

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Ensure that assessment tools be developed that would provide teachers with greater clarity around observing not just students confidence levels when talking, but also their ability to negotiate, ability to articulate emotional responses, ability to put forward a contrary point of view appropriately, an ability to verbally paraphrase, and the ability to participate constructively as both a good listener and contributor to conversations.

Funding and achievement

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Fund Support Staff salaries separately from schools general Operations Grant
- Improve funding for ICT
- Fund better security options for school campuses
- Prepare for the impact of changing modes of learning and climate change upon learning facilities.

- Increase resources for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programmes, to ensure that our newest residents can participate fully in education and integrate into our society as soon as possible after their arrival.
- Target the lower achievement rates for boys (an international trend which is the subject of much research).

Creating a Safe Learning Environment

"It is clear to anyone who has been in education for any length of time that children are now acting differently in school and community than children did 20 – 30 years ago" (Vincent P F, 1996)

A 2006 school violence survey revealed that one in seven primary teachers surveyed reported being physically assaulted. Truancy is at an all time high and there is a clear link between this fact and youth crime rates. Bullying was nominated as the reason 10% of secondary students are absent on any given day. NZ principals identify disruptive behaviour as the most common in-school obstacle to learning.

Family life has changed with children now being more likely to experience a number of different family arrangements than in the past. Sole parenting is common, parents are older and large numbers of children have no resident father figure.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Include parents where possible in developing and enforcing agreements between students with disruptive behaviour and the school prior to resorting to exclusions and/or stand-downs.
- Require the government to respond to the recent call from NZEI Te Riu Roa (primary teachers' union) to provide clear guidelines for teachers as to how to manage and reduce disruptive behaviour.
- Support restorative justice styled disciplinary programmes in schools to combat bullying and other misbehaviour, requiring the student to understand the implications of his/her actions, involving the parents, and arriving at a punishment (e.g. community service) that is an alternative to suspension or expulsion.
- Expect principals and senior staff to regionally to develop on- and off-site alternative provision for suspensions longer than five days, with all exclusions properly recorded.
- Make discipline a key factor in evaluating school performance.
- Resource alternative education providers to work with at-risk youth who have dropped out of mainstream schooling.
- Break down the information that the Ministry currently collects on truancy and stand-down rates by schools, not just by region.
- Improve classroom discipline by developing 'responsible behaviour agreements', to be signed by disruptive students, their parents and the school principal, setting out expectations for improved behaviour, steps to be taken, and consequences for failure.
- Merge District Truancy Services and the Non-Enrolment Truancy Service, increase their funding, and require the new organisation to work more closely with schools, police, welfare agencies and non-governmental organisations (e.g. Maori Wardens) to ensure that they respond quickly to truancy before it develops into a bigger problem.
- Work with schools to ensure that they remain drug-free by promoting treatment options in conjunction with punishment for drug offences.

- Undertake a campaign to promote academic role models amongst youth, but particularly targeted at boys.
- Expand the Social Workers in Schools programme.

Boys Education

Males make up fewer than one percent of early childhood teachers and one in five primary school teachers, so it is perhaps not surprising that male students are falling behind in what is essentially now a female dominated environment. In the words of one educationalist, Dr Paul Baker, who has served as a Government advisor, the Ministry of Education "is stuck fighting the girls can do anything" battle. "There is a reluctance in the Ministry to accept that the emphasis needs now to be more on boys." This is despite the fact that for every six girls that pass NCEA level one, only five boys pass. Boys make up close to three-quarters of referrals for literacy help, speech/language therapy and behavioural difficulties. At the higher end, women make up nearly 60% of our University population now and this percentage appears to be growing.

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Address the growing achievement gap between male and female students.
- Encourage more men to join the teaching profession at all levels.
- Recruit more Maori and Pacific teachers.
- Investigate the use of single-sex classrooms within coeducational schools.
- Find other ways to make the current educational environment more boy-friendly, without being detrimental to female students.

Special Education and Gifted Students

"SPECIAL EDUCATION is the provision of extra help, adapted programmes, learning environments or specialised equipment or materials to support children and young people with their learning and help them participate in education"- (Ministry of Education, 2006)

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Increase funding to the Ongoing Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (ORRS). Currently 1% of students receive some ORRS funding even though we know that one in five New Zealander's have some sort of disability.
- Review the guidelines used to determine if a student still qualifies for ORRS funding to ensure that future progress isn't hampered by a reduction in allocation based on current progress made by a student
- Increase funding for Specialist Vision Teachers so that the internationally accepted ratio for teachers to pupil (1:12) is realised. Currently in NZ the ration is 1:37 which is totally unacceptable.
- Ensure that the professional development of teachers and staff working with special needs students is funded separately rather than having to come out of the Special Needs Grant and thus reducing the amount available for directly supporting students.
- Review the work programme of Special Education staff within the Ministry of Education and out-of school offices to ensure teachers and students are being appropriately supported.
- Include mandatory course content on teaching children and adults with disabilities in all teacher education.

- Promote an increase of funding for early identification of children with special needs and disabilities with targeted systematic, intensive and high quality interventions.
- Fund support staff such as teacher aides centrally rather than from operational grants.

United**Future** acknowledges that Gifted children are among some of the most neglected due perceptions that they are fortunate rather than the truth which is that they are poorly catered for.

- Better educate student teachers and current classroom teachers on how to identify and respond to the needs of gifted children
- Due to the small number of gifted children ensure that funding and resources are regionally managed in collaboration with schools in that region that have gifted students on their role.
- Fund full-day withdrawal programmes, such as The Gifted Education Centre's One Day School, for children assessed as requiring such provision.
- Provide regional resource teachers to support the learning of gifted students and their classroom teachers

See also the Disabilities Policy

The Correspondence School

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Enable all New Zealand students to access and benefit from dual enrolment, so that primarily correspondence students can take classes at local schools as well as the reverse scenario.
- Offer students the chance to have face-to-face interactions and participate in correspondence school camps, school days and/or workshops in order to develop co-operation, competition, physical & social skills
- Fund the Parents Association annually through the Ministry of Education.
- Reinstate elected parent and staff representatives on the Board of Trustees.
- Ensure that Distance & Itinerant students' needs are ring-fenced and protected and open up funding streams such as ORRS for students with disabilities and special needs.
- Develop an NZQA qualification for teaching correspondence to students.
- Review supervisor payment rates.

Adult Continuing & Community Education

It is United**Future** policy to:

- Develop a strategy for adult and community education that determines the most appropriate provision of learning opportunities in both urban and rural settings
- Establish a network of 'rural education posts' to serve as adult and community education information centres and meeting places and providers, utilising existing educational facilities
- Increase funding for adult literacy programmes, including those in workplaces, and ensure that every community education centre runs such programmes.
- Increase funding for budget advice programmes, and ensure that every community education centre runs such programmes.