

1. What should our schools be focusing on in order to prepare young people for the future?

In January 2016, RECLAIM's Powerhouse Pioneers group created their first manifesto (attached). As a collection of working class young people from across Greater Manchester aged 14-20, they came together to raise awareness of the issues they believe require focus from the Northern Powerhouse, to campaign, and to amplify the voices of working class communities.

The point that became of most importance stemmed from their issues and disillusionment with the current education system, their curriculum and experiences. In discussion around the lack of relevant information learnt, the amount of tests making school feel like an exam factory, teachers under pressure and unequipped to educate them to their best ability, they created their manifesto point:

'We say what teachers need to hear, while denied life lessons; support education teaching beyond the classroom'

The group strongly believe they are not prepared to leave the school gates. They would not know how to survive in the outside world, or have the skills to do so. They know how to answer to a mark scheme, uncreatively and word for word, as taught by their teachers, but they do not know how to use the individual creativity of their minds, and critically think about the world around them or prepare for it. Their resilience is worsened when they fail to meet a mark scheme answer (simply for thinking differently, or phrasing their answer incorrectly), and that is the resilience they are equipped with to go into the future – a lack of confidence in being able to survive unless they have a strict rulebook to follow.

They feel disappointed that they are learning things that adults can certify they have never used again in their future (Pythagoras' Theorem etc.), and have an urgent need to learn how to pay a bill, or feel confident at an interview, and ultimately live independently and as the individual they are. When I have asked young people 'If you were to leave school this year at 16, would you know what to do without the support of your parents?', their answer, is no.

They want a curriculum for life, and fear the outside world that will test them in ways they are not prepared for. They want to bring back citizenship style classes that have been taken away, that teach them about things that they will inevitably meet in their future; bills, budgeting, life skills.

Our schools should be creating mark schemes that cater to every learner, because many of our young people feel held back as they are unable to express themselves in the way they actually think, knowing they have to write a certain sentence or word to gain a mark. This method cripples young people's creativity, and locks them out of their future options as they don't get to practise talents they may hold that are seen as irrelevant, but are potentially vital to a career path they could thrive in. They want schools to offer more opportunities that mean any young person has a path to their chosen interest from an early stage. Schools should focus on opening up not only academic routes into the future, but labour focus routes, access to the arts, or social media industries etc.

Our young people want to play a part in the current design of curriculum, they cannot fathom why their education, an education for young people that dictates their future, is being decided by people who have been out of education for decades.

In an age where our young people are being brought up engrossed in social media, they are not blind to the fact that there is a terrifying world ahead of them, and they can see it at their fingertips. This needs to be addressed, to ensure our young people are resilient at a time where young people's mental well-being is at an all-time low. Their future needs to be a focus, while the basics of English and maths should be covered, as should living happy lives that they are resourced for.

2. Should schools play a role in developing skills, or should subject knowledge be prioritised?

Our young people want to develop skills in all areas, although they enjoy subjects specific to their interests as individuals, this is irrelevant when that subject comes with five exams that put pressured learning on young people, often backfiring towards poor results. When their GCSE results no longer matter on their CV's, they need to have secured the skills that show as a person, they are employable. Those that are

skilled outside subject learning need to be further educated where their talents lie, not a one size fits all education system.

3. Who should be responsible for ensuring that young people develop soft, financial and entrepreneurial skills?

Young people believe schools have a significant responsibility for ensuring the day they leave the school gates, they would know how to live independently, particularly where many do not have others to support them. We are creating the next generation, without giving them resources for the outside world. Young people work longer days in education than some working weeks, when the working day is followed by hours of homework. If society is taking this much time from a young person, then they are responsible for developing them for the real world as they are the prime education giver. Although time spent with family and friends can be an ideal opportunity to develop lifestyle learnings, this should be a time to break out and to focused on developing social skills, interaction and engagement in other hobbies.

4. Do education providers have the resources to prepare young people for the workforce?

Our young people would argue that a reduction in the time spent teaching in subject areas that will not support them in the outside world would allow education providers to offer alternative lessons that prepare young people for the workforce. The cutting of citizenship opportunities, originally prime time for CV classes, budgeting, and job applications, has worsened the situation. Education providers could offer extra-curricular opportunities to learn more about the workforce which we firmly believe young people would attend in their own time, as many of our young people do for RECLAIM sessions that support their further learning about their place in society.