

# Comparing Manifestos - Part 2

In the run up to this May's general election, Schools Week will analyse the manifestos of various education organisations, typically from opposite ends of the political spectrum. This second pre-election manifesto comparison is between the Independent Schools Council and the teachers' union NASUWT

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL

The Independent Schools Council (ISC) does what it says on the tin; it represents independent schools across the United Kingdom.

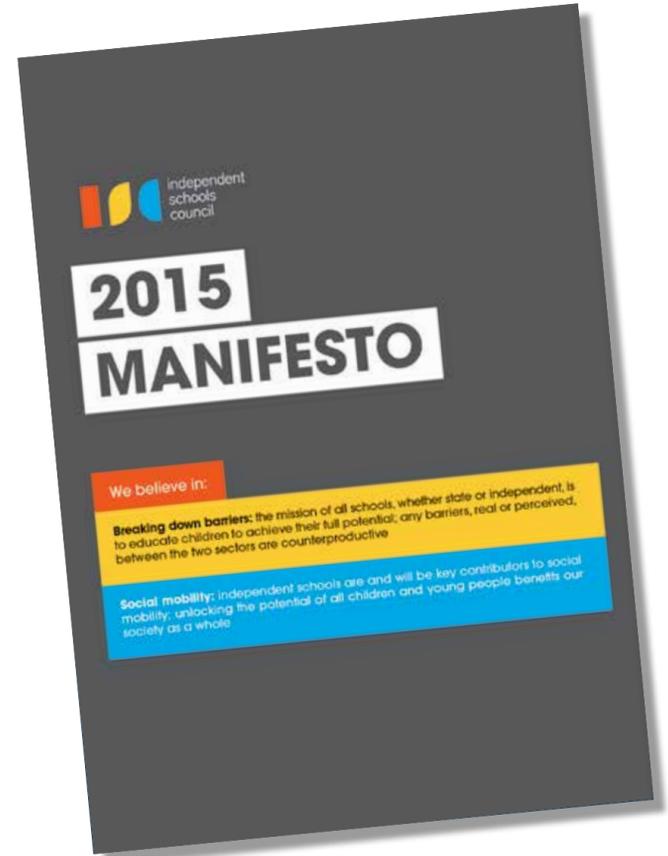
Its Election 2015 Manifesto, launched on February 4, was collated, and agreed by all eight of its constituent organisations: the Girls' Schools Association, the Headmasters' & Headmistresses' Conference, the Independent Association of Prep Schools, the Independent Schools Association, the Society of Heads, the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools, the Independent Schools' Bursars Association, and the Council of British International Schools.

The ISC represents about 1,300 independent schools. The current chairman is former Harrow School headmaster Barnaby Lenon. A trustee of the New Schools Network, he helped to start the free school, London Academy of Excellence, where he is now chair of governors.

The council says it has sent its policy document to "opinion formers" in both the



media and politics, in the hope that it will in "some small way" influence policy and reset the relationship independent schools have with the outside world.



## NASUWT

The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) has more than 330,000 members.

Its story began almost a century ago with the 1919 formation of the National Association of Men Teachers, which a year later became the National Association of Schoolmasters.

In 1976 it merged with the Union of Women Teachers, after the Sex Discrimination Act made it illegal to exclude membership on the grounds of gender. The NASUWT was born.

Unlike other groups, it has not compiled a "manifesto" as such, but is calling the issues in its Vote for Education Campaign "promises" that it wants the next government to uphold.

It says it has conducted research with parents and families during this parliament, which has shaped the campaign.

The union's campaign encompasses digital campaigning via social media and the NASUWT website, and the distribution of booklets, posters and letters to schools, teachers and the wider public.

The NASUWT will also be making the on-going campaign a focal point of its

## NASUWT The Teachers' Union

annual conference at Easter.

The union has produced a canvassing card to support voters in asking election candidates who come to their door key questions about their support for education.

The union is urging its members to register to vote in the upcoming election and on its website points members in the direction to the government's "register to vote" online site.



## WHAT THE LEADERS SAY

The thrust of the policy recommendations by the ISC is for the independent sector to break down barriers between it and state schools, yet remain autonomous from outside bodies.

The group wants to step away from the image it feels it has in the wider world.

Acting general secretary Charlotte Vere said: "Three years ago Sir Michael Wilshaw said that there is a 'Berlin wall' between the state and the independent sectors. The idea, if not the fact, has persisted.

"Statements such as these are unhelpful; they prevent independent schools from offering all that they could and should do to benefit the education of all children in this country. It is time now to tear the barriers down; we want to be seen for what we really are and what we can offer.

"The continued use of school type as a proxy for wealth is endemic within government and in other organisations. It is meaningless and a lazy stereotype that helps no one.

"There are disadvantaged children in independent schools just as there are



Charlotte Vere

advantaged children in the state sector."

She said 90 per cent of ISC schools worked in partnership with the state sector and local community, and the ISC wanted to offer more bursaries to children.

"It is time to drop the outdated stereotypes and choose a positive view of the future. Let us focus on what our real priority should be: educating children."

## MANIFESTO POINTS

- Break down the barriers, whether real or perceived, between the independent and state sectors
- Increase social mobility to "unlock the potential of all children and young people" to benefit society as a whole
- Independence from both central government and local authorities, which leads to "excellence and innovation"
- Increase in partnerships between independent and state schools and new partnerships will be initiated based on local need, not national diktat
- No further significant exam reforms; government should take a step back for the time being. ISC schools are free to choose their exams and devise their own curricular and accountability measures

## TO WHICH PARTY ARE THEY CLOSEST

The ISC's manifesto seems to lash out, subtly, at certain points raised by the Labour party.

In what was a controversial announcement, shadow education secretary Tristram Hunt announced independent schools would lose their tax breaks worth £700m over five years if they did not help state pupils if a Labour government was in place after May. By stating, in its manifesto, that it

would increase partnership with its state counterparts without "national diktat", there is a nod to its anger with Mr Hunt's proposals.

Yet, the sector also does not seem to be too happy with coalition policies over the past five years, mainly exam reforms pushed through by former education secretary Michael Gove. However it echoes the Conservative push for "autonomy" in the school system.

## MANIFESTO POINTS

- All children and young people are entitled to be taught by a qualified teacher, and highly skilled professionals
- All children and young people are entitled to a broad-based, balanced and national curriculum
- All barriers to achievement for children and young people with special educational needs should be removed; no child's life or life chances should be derailed or degraded by poverty
- Access to education should not be based on parents' ability to pay; investment in education should be a key priority for government; publicly funded education should not be run for profit
- Every child and young person should be guaranteed a place at a local school or college

## TO WHICH PARTY ARE THEY CLOSEST

The union describes itself as having no party political affiliations.

However, its call for an end to unqualified teachers echoes that of the shadow education secretary, Tristram Hunt, and views expressed by Liberal Democrat leader and deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg, in June last year.

The NASUWT makes it clear that it is unhappy with the way education policy has drifted in the past four and a half years

of the Conservative/Lib Dem parliament, mainly spearheaded by former education secretary Michael Gove.

The union says that it has been one of the strongest voices for trade union action; a vocal group that has been part of numerous strikes against teacher pay and pension changes.

It is clear the NASUWT wants anything but a Conservative government after the public heads to the polls in May.

## WHAT THE LEADERS SAY

The NASUWT believes all of the "promises" it has listed have been broken under the past five years of a coalition government.

General secretary Chris Keates says this May's general election will be a "key defining moment" for education and public services.

"The focus of the union's campaigning activity is that a publicly funded education service should provide entitlements for all children and young people. These are the promises successive governments have made to children and young people, which have been broken by the coalition.

"The NASUWT's campaign sets out what is now required by government to ensure that all children and young people have access to high quality education provision.

"The NASUWT is calling for a return to the ethos and values of public service—social justice and equality. Public services held and managed in trust for the public and democratically accountable

"The NASUWT makes the point in its campaign that teachers' pay and conditions of service are inextricably linked to the provision of high quality education. Attacks on teachers are attacks



Chris Keates

on children and young people.

"The NASUWT believes that all who believe in social justice, in equality and democracy and who are concerned about the future of our children and young people will recognise the need for a change of political direction after the 2015 general election."