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SCHOOLS**WEEK**

FE Week

GENERAL
ELECTION 2015
EDUCATION, EDUCATION,
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Oxford Cambridge and RSA

GENERAL ELECTION 2015



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Education and skills are undeniably two key battlegrounds in this General Election.

Promises and pledges about schools and FE policy have been raining down from the highest party political echelons since well before the short campaign started, and in less than a fortnight it will all come

to a head with what many are predicting will be one of the closest elections in living memory.

I have spent the last few months following the party leaders to manifesto launches, party conferences, school visits and press conferences.

The resulting 20-page supplement in front of you offers an in-depth look at the policies pitched by the five main parties contesting seats in England, along with in-depth reaction from unions, sector organisations and, as usual, enlightening analysis from a host of experts from both the schools and FE & skills sectors.

For each of the three main parties, we have four pages of content, including news, exclusive comments from party leaders and senior figures and the full list of their

policies relating to education and skills. These are presented in the order in which the manifestos were launched.

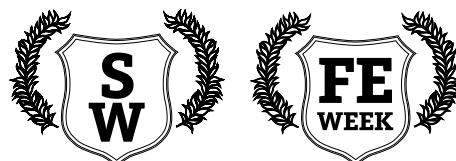
We also looked at the Green Party and Ukip's offerings on education and skills, and our pages on those parties can be found further back in this supplement.

It is often said that in modern politics, you can't tell the difference between the main parties. But as far as education and skills policy goes, that could not be more wrong.

That is why we felt it was important to present information and analysis on the manifestos of all five parties in one supplement for the readerships of both Schools Week and FE Week.

And if that wasn't a good enough reason for this first collaborative supplement,

with large structural shake-ups proposed by many of the parties, schools and FE policy and decision-making could become even more intertwined after May 7, and we should all be ready.



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



ED MILIBAND LABOUR

There's nothing Ed Miliband likes more than a good old Q&A at a school or college.

Such is the level of his interest in these events that they have become a bit of a running theme in this general election campaign.

Mr Miliband kicked off his tour of the nation's schools several months ago, when his education vision was outlined in the hall of his old Haverstock School, in Camden, London.

He went on to meet learners and answer more questions at Nelson and Colne College, in Lancashire, followed soon afterwards by a visit to Redcar



Labour Party leader Ed Miliband and Scottish Labour leader Jim Murphy meet with apprentice tradesmen during a visit to the Queenslie Training Centre, Glasgow

and Cleveland College, in North Yorkshire.

Pensby High School in Wirral has also played host to the Labour leader, who went on to meet apprentices at Queenslie Training Centre, Glasgow.



Labour party leader Ed Miliband holds a People's Question Time at Pensby High School in Wirral while on the General Election campaign trail



CHARLOTTE BOSWORTH

DIRECTOR OF SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT AT OCR

A VIEW FROM OCR

'Education, education, education', a political rallying cry from a previous election. It's not news that education is a policy that all parties like to tinker with. On the face of it, the education brief is one in which change can be made and demonstrated quickly to the electorate. The biggest problem with this is it always takes much longer than politicians expect to have an impact. And impact is a difficult thing to measure.

The current cohort of Year 5 children in primary schools in England is experiencing the implementation of the new National Curriculum. Those children will progress on to secondary school and then on to further and higher education and eventually into the workplace. This cohort of Year 5 children will

enter the workplace, if they do so at 18, in 2023. Given that the lifespan of a government is now fixed to 5 years and the average length of reformed qualifications is somewhere around the 5 or 6 year mark, this cohort may take a series of qualifications at 16 and 18 that do not yet exist. How then do we measure the impact of the national curriculum reform and how do we measure the impact of the current round of general and vocational qualification reform?

The unfortunate answer is that too often we don't. In responding to the current round of general qualifications reform, we have looked back at the policies attributed to languages qualifications. There we see a trail of good intentions, policies and strategies in great

numbers, however, very few, if any, are carried through to full implementation. Most are forgotten and then when the issue arises again a new strategy or policy is created.

In the foreword to the Skills Manifesto we sponsored with FE Week in the autumn, we called for a comprehensive review of the whole education and skills system. A holistic review that analyses the whole system from primary education all through to further and higher education, to encompass adult education and programmes associated with getting people back into work that come under the purview of the DWP rather than the DfE or BIS. It must look at teaching styles, learning styles, effective use of technology and how pathways through education and training can be flexible and enable transition. It's a giant ask, but central to all this ask is that there should be consensus across political parties to create a long term solution rather than short term tinkering. If we are to have an education system that can respond to the changing world, then we cannot have an education system that has to respond to qualification related reform every five years.

It is easy to understand why there is always a leap towards qualification reform when policy makers want to effect change in the education

system. Qualifications are measuring tools; they assess learners at the end of a course about the skills and knowledge they have gained while undertaking that course. If we believe that there are elements of our education system that are not delivering, then changing the content of those courses must change those outcomes? Unfortunately, it is not that simple. We must also look at teaching capacity, resources, funding, training, etc. To truly effect change, we cannot just change the content of the test that learners sit at the end of the course. We must also consider the different purposes of education in its broadest sense.

We hope this supplement helps you make sense of all the different promises being made by each political party in the education and skills arena. It may or may not sway your vote, but remember, in this election more than any other these manifesto pledges are likely to be the opening gambit of a coalition brokering deal, so the actual policies that we get in the next five years are still up for debate and hopefully be an opportunity to create a consensus to go forward.

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DAVID CAMERON CONSERVATIVES

David Cameron is also clocking up his fair share of school visits as he tries to convince the country his plan is worth sticking with.

Earlier in the campaign, Mr Cameron went to Upton Heath County Primary School, in Chester, in person to announce new redevelopment funding.

At a subsequent visit to Green School for Girls, in West London, Mr Cameron joined Education Secretary Nicky Morgan to announce plans for 500 new free schools.

And Abingdon and Witney College was chosen as the location for a rally for Oxford West



Prime Minister David Cameron meets pupils during a visit to Sandymoor School in Sandymoor, Cheshire

and Abingdon candidate Nicola Blackwood in early April, attended by the PM.

Those who at this point still need any convincing that education and skills are key battleground issues for the Conservatives need look no further than the party's manifesto launch, held at UTC Swindon.



Prime Minister David Cameron meets apprentice Cory Hurst (right) during a visit to Camira Fabrics in Huddersfield, where they make textiles for trains and buses



NICK CLEGG LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Nick Clegg also seems intent on completing a tour of every single school in the country as he tries to garner support for Liberal Democrat candidates in marginal seats.

Early last month, the Deputy Prime Minister made and ate Cornish pasties with youngsters at St Merryn School, in North Cornwall.

Later in the campaign, Mr Clegg took questions from pupils at Cradle Hill Primary School, in Lewes.

Schools and colleges in London have also had their fair share of visits from Mr Clegg, including



Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg and Business Secretary Vince Cable (left) take part in a pottery class at Richmond Adult Community college in London

Weston Park Primary School, in Hornsey, and Boutcher C of E Primary School, in Southwark.

The Lib Dem leader also took a pottery class with business secretary Vince Cable at Richmond Community College.



Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg meets reception class pupils making hand print artworks during a General Election campaign visit to Boutcher C of E Primary School, in Southwark, London



Front cover: Press Association Images



Above: Press Association Images

Face-to-face guidance the headline act

Universal face-to-face careers advice for secondary school pupils was the headline act as Labour revealed its education manifesto this month.

As well as hammering home its commitment to its flagship policy of requiring all teachers to be qualified, the party allowed its shiny new careers policy to shine when secretary Tristram Hunt took to the stage at Microsoft's offices in Victoria to launch the document itself.

A big issue which affects schools and skills policy in equal measure, Labour knew careers advice was an easy win for them in a battle to win friends in a sector which is notoriously hard to please. Under the terms of the policy, £50m from higher education access and participation funding will be used to pay at least 1,000 careers advisers to work with clusters of schools.

Mr Hunt said: "Britain succeeds when all of our young people are supported to reach their potential. Too many young people are having opportunities closed off to them — whether that be accessing our leading universities or high quality apprenticeships.

"David Cameron has failed young people. Labour has a better plan, one that will unleash the potential of all young people.

"So if you are a young person, whether you want to pursue gold standard vocational education or a high class academic pathway into work, Labour will make sure that you have the face-to-face guidance early on, so that doors are not closed off to you. Only Labour will give this support to all young people that is currently the preserve of only a privileged few."

The appearance of Mr Hunt's shadow cabinet colleague Chuka Umunna, the Shadow Business Secretary, alongside him at the launch will have done nothing to quash rumours that a Department for Education and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills merger could be on



the cards.

Mr Umunna said: "All young people should have the opportunity to succeed and progress to a skilled, secure career.

"But under the Tories pathways to the workplace have been taken away and too many have been left without the support they need, stuck in low-paid, insecure work. And — as the CBI has highlighted — for Britain's future prosperity employers need a pipeline of skilled employees ready for the world of work.

"That's why Labour will ensure all young people can access face-to-face careers advice, with schools working in partnership with businesses, colleges and universities."

The launch was also an opportunity for the party to go over old ground, something which proved less popular in the education sector, with doubts already in practitioners' minds whether initiatives like technical degrees, master teachers and institutes of technical education will really bring about the reform Labour hopes to see.

Plans to extend free childcare from 15 to 25 hours for working parents of three and four-year-olds, paid for by an increase in the bank levy, were widely welcomed.

But anyone hoping the absence of Labour's plan to scrap apprenticeships below level three from the education manifesto document was a sign the party was softening its line will have been left disappointed after Mr Umunna confirmed the party was still committed to its plan.

Labour has previously pledged to have as many people starting apprenticeships as starting university by 2025.



“Only a Labour government will give our children and young people, the future they deserve”

Ed Miliband

Danny Lawson/PA Wire/Press Association Images

Vote for us — Ed Miliband writes for FE Week and Schools Week

“For Britain to succeed in the 21st century, we need an education system that delivers for all our children and young people.

Only Labour will protect the entire education budget, from the early years to age 19, ensuring that it rises in line with inflation, every year. Only Labour will raise the standard and status of vocational education and skills. Only Labour will cap class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds at 30 pupils.

The education system needs a Labour government. The number of unqualified teachers has risen by 16 per cent in the last year, teaching 400,000 children. There are still 1.6 million children in under-performing schools, and the attainment gap between disadvantaged

children and the rest is growing for the first time since records began.

We won't for the sake of it reform everything this government has done. We're aware of the strains that change puts on teachers.

But we will put an end to the free schools programme. Ministers have spent at least £241m of government money on free schools in areas that already have enough school places while other areas are in desperate need, and overall the performance of the free schools has been poor.

We will put teaching standards first in every classroom, requiring teachers to continue building their skills and subject knowledge on the job, with more high quality training and new career paths, including a new master teacher status.

Our aim is that the best teachers have a promise of career progress that doesn't necessarily take them away from the frontline with children.

With our young people facing increasing global competition in the work place, our goal is to transform vocational education. We need to do much more to support the 50 per cent of young people not taking the traditional academic route to university.

We will introduce a new gold-standard technical baccalaureate for 16 to 18-year-olds, and new institutes of technical education to give vocational training more equal status with academic studies. High quality apprenticeships and new technical degrees will act as the pinnacle of this new vocational route.

Britain only succeeds when working people succeed. This is a plan to reward hard work, share prosperity and build a better Britain.

Britain can be better
The Labour Party Manifesto 2015

Improving education is at the heart of what Labour is all about. Only a Labour government will give all our children and young people the future they deserve."

What the manifesto says

Early years

- Protect spending on the early years in real terms
- Restore the role of Sure Start as family hubs in the community, with an obligation to provide childcare and a focus on early intervention
- Extend free childcare from 15 to 25 hours for working parents of three and four year olds, paid for by an increase in the bank levy
- Give parents a legal guarantee of access to childcare from 8am to 6pm through their local primary school

Standards

- Protect schools spending in real terms, to drive up standards
- Tackle areas of underachievement, with new directors of school standards to support local schools to improve and respond to the concerns of parents
- Deliver smaller class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, paid for by ending the wasteful Free Schools programme
- Require private schools to partner with state schools, as a condition of receiving Business Rates Relief

Teaching

- Ensure all teachers become qualified
- Raise standards through new Master Teachers, expert in their subject
- Require all teachers to build their skills throughout their careers, as a condition of remaining in the classroom
- Improve school discipline by ensuring teachers are trained to control a class
- Support and improve school leadership with a new Leadership Institute and gold standard head teacher qualifications and training

Skills

- Re-focus existing spending away from low-level apprenticeships for older

- people, and towards a system where apprenticeships are focused on new job entrants, lasting at least two years, and providing level three qualifications or above
- Deliver a new gold-standard Technical Baccalaureate for 16 to 18-year-olds
- Ensure all young people study English and maths to 18.
- Raise standards in FE, with new Institutes of Technical Education
- Guarantee all young people aged 11+ face-to-face careers advice with a £50m divert from the higher education access and participation budget
- Give every young person that gets the grades has the right to a high quality apprenticeship
- Introduce new Technical Degrees delivered by universities and employers
- Equipping young people for the future
- Ensure all schools deliver age-appropriate sex and relationships education
- Update and strengthen the Citizenship curriculum
- Introduce compulsory work experience for 14 to 16-year-olds
- Give kinship carers access to support and give vulnerable children in kinship care priority in school admissions
- Give teachers better training in mental health awareness



Contents

Foreword by Ed Miliband... 15

A better future for Britain... 17

Building an economy that works for working people... 115

Providing world-class health and education services... 137

Helping our families and communities to thrive... 143

Reforming government to give more power to people... 161

Standing up for Britain's interests in Europe and the world... 173

Time for change... 183



SCHOOLSWEEK

FE Week

Mixed reception for Labour's schools plans

Labour can usually rely on most unions to be fairly friendly, but a lukewarm response awaited the party on the day it launched its education manifesto. Although several groups, the National Association of Schoolmasters and Association of Women Teachers (NASUWT) among them, praised the party for its pledges, others, including the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) were less positive.

Adrian Prandle, ATL director of economic strategy and negotiations, said the party had identified some key problems affecting children and teachers resulting from current education and economic policy, but said the manifesto failed to address some major issues.

He said: "Parents will be disappointed that Labour has not outlined any policy for the 1.5 million children and young people with special educational needs.

"For this 18 per cent of the school-age children Labour appears not to have 'A Better Plan For Education'. Teachers will be dismayed that Labour does not properly say how it will change inspection to prevent it from causing high volumes of unnecessary paperwork that distracts from the classroom and limits innovative teaching and learning."

Mr Prandle (pictured) said the "big vision" needed for education was a transformation from "competition to collaboration", adding: "Labour's pledge to protect education funding in real terms is a vitally important first step for children and young people but they should not underestimate the complexities of this responsibility.

"Labour's plans to provide independent face-to-face careers, advice and guidance to all students studying at school or college are much-needed. The current system simply is not working. With demand for school places increasing, it is right to halt the coalition's free school experiment which has pulled scarce resources away from places of need."

Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT, said Labour's education manifesto demonstrated a "clear recognition" by the party that a publicly-funded education system "should secure the educational entitlements of all children and young people, regardless of where they live or go to school or college."

She added: "The NASUWT welcomes Labour's continuing commitment to securing the entitlement of all children and young people to be taught by a qualified teacher.

"All evidence shows that investment in the early years of a child's life make a huge difference to educational



attainment. I therefore welcome the commitment to restoring the Sure Start programme which fell victim to this coalition's unnecessary and savage cuts."

Ms Keates welcomed the manifesto's emphasis on high-quality vocational provision and condemned existing government policy as "narrow", "elitist" and "academically-focused".

She added: "The emphasis on ensuring that there is high-quality vocational provision would mark an end to the restrictions of the coalition's narrow, elitist, academically focused curriculum that is stifling the talents and skills of so many of our young people. All young people should have an entitlement to choose to pursue their aspirations, either through

an academic or vocational pathway.

"A clear and coherent national framework for the provision of independent, high-quality careers guidance has the potential to end the current ad-hoc, unequal provision and bring a consistency of approach for the benefit of all."

EXPERT



NATASHA PORTER

Deputy head of the education unit at Policy Exchange and a former senior leader at King Solomon Academy, West London

Miliband steers careful course

There are three things worth considering in Labour's education offer: what will it mean for schools, what will it mean for the education system more generally, and what isn't included.

The last of these is perhaps the most interesting. The overall focus of the offer is very technocratic.

The more traditional territory of the Blair government — raising school standards across the broad five-to-18 phase — doesn't get a look in until the fourth paragraph, and there is little mention outside the early years section of the focus of the Brown government on schools' involvement in the wider children's services agenda.

Similarly, there are no crumbs of comfort for those on the left of the party, who hoped to see a move away from academies, or a route to return schools to local authority control. In short, this

is an authentically Ed Miliband Labour education offering; helping the next generation of a Britain "which only succeeds when working people succeed."

But what would this offer mean for schools? Well, looking beneath the rhetoric, actually quite little different to now. The commitment on school budgets is very similar to Tory plans by the time it reached classrooms. There is ostensibly generous protection for the more bedraggled early years and 16-to-19 sectors, but within the overall financial envelope it is difficult to see any real investment in those sectors that doesn't mean a consequent reduction in five-to-16 funding.

There would be a requirement on the 17,000 teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS) to begin work on this qualification, but this affects just 3.8 per

cent of the labour force. The 2,985 infant class sizes of more than 30 pupils will need to disappear, but only after 12 months of excess size, and all primary schools will need to consider how their pupils can access childcare between 8am and 6pm, but not necessarily on their premises, and with no mandatory take up.

Possibly the biggest changes and demands on schools will be in the curriculum, where AS-levels will be reintroduced, sex and relationships education and citizenship will be revamped, and all students aged between 16 and 18 will continue studying both English and maths (most probably through the standalone core maths qualification and a new English equivalent)

Teachers will "be expected to update their knowledge and skills regularly" and will benefit from new 'master teacher' status, sitting alongside the development of the College of Teaching.

At a system level, Labour are committed to the introduction of a middle-tier system of oversight for all schools via new directors of school standards (DSS), who would assume responsibility for all schools, ending the current division between academies and local authority schools. All remaining maintained schools will be offered "academy freedoms".

The new DSSs will also take over

the vexed issue of commissioning new schools, considering "innovative bids from established providers, good local authorities, parents, teachers and entrepreneurs". The phrase 'parent-led academies', Labour's version of free schools, did not make the final cut, and this is in line with a considerable toughening of the rhetoric around free schools in recent months; but again the policy remains as it always has (new schools will be allowed, just not in areas of surplus places).

In general, Labour have left themselves more space to borrow for investment purposes, which could mean an increase in schools capital spending. There is a brief reference only to Ofsted, with a commitment to greater peer review. The manifesto launch from Labour demonstrates the relatively narrow terrain on which all three main parties now congregate. There is considerably less clear red water here than in health, for example. But this should by no means be taken as a criticism. The bulk of challenges that schools will face over the next parliament relate to managing spending reductions, recruiting and retaining teachers as the economy grows, and handling the implementation of curriculum and assessment changes. This should continue to be their focus regardless of who wins on May 7.

Careers guidance pledge gets thumbs up from skills leaders

Labour's offer of face-to-face careers advice for learners aged 11-plus has certainly piqued the interest of several FE sector leaders.

Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel was among the first sector representatives to come out in favour of the proposal after it was announced by Ed Miliband at a central London launch event.

Mr Doel said: "Careers guidance and advice is currently failing young people in this country and we're pleased that the Labour Party is looking to rectify this.

"We need a system that supports young people to make informed choices and guaranteed careers advice from trained advisers would help provide this.

"Labour's proposal is similar to that which we proposed in our manifesto which is to establish a partnership between universities, schools, colleges and employers.

"In addition, however, there should be systematic careers education built into the curriculum, teaching children and young people about different types of businesses, how gender stereotyping affects career decisions and qualities needed by employers."

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal welcomed Labour's commitment to 'gold standard vocational learning', and said he was pleased the party had decided to focus resources around the National Careers Service to improve the quality of careers guidance in schools.

But he said he took issue with the manifesto's statement that 'two-thirds of apprenticeships are of a standard that would not be recognised in our competitor countries due to the re-badging of low level workplace training'.

He said: "We share the view of the CBI, Unionlearn and the Commons education committee that high quality level two apprenticeships should remain part of the programme because they offer a ladder of opportunity to further progression.

"It is also important that a new government regards apprenticeships not simply as a tool for solving

youth unemployment but as a programme for improving the skills of those in employment."

David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace), also responded positively to several of the party's pledges.

He said: "The Labour Party manifesto takes a long-term view of the investment needed to build a stronger and fairer economy.

"I'm pleased to see things like their commitment to reduce the proportion of citizens unable to use the internet and the strong focus on the five million people on low pay by forming new partnerships between employers and employees to improve business performance and job quality."

"Niace has been campaigning on both of these in recent months."

Mr Hughes said that "inevitably", there was more of a focus on young people and less for those in work, but added that the manifesto, if implemented, would begin to "re-design the 18-to-24 phase".

He added: "Once again the devolution theme is strong but I would like to see more emphasis on how lifelong learning has a crucial role to play in mental health and the joining up of, aged care and health."

Sixth Form Colleges Association deputy chief executive James Kewin said: "The manifesto pledge to protect the 16-to-19 budget in real terms is extremely welcome.

"Without this, many sixth form colleges would only be able to provide an impoverished educational experience to students. It is important to get the detail right (eg agreeing the level that protection will be pegged at and the implications of employer pension and national insurance increases) but there is at least an

acceptance that the sector cannot sustain a further round of cuts.

"The proposal for directors of school standards has the potential to ensure there is effective competition and greater collaboration between providers. And the plan to reverse the decoupling of AS and A-levels is good news for students — particularly less confident learners."



Stewart Segal

EXPERT



MICK FLETCHER

A FOUNDER MEMBER OF THE POLICY CONSORTIUM, A DIRECTOR OF RCU LTD, A VISITING RESEARCH FELLOW AT THE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON AND A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE FE WEEK EXPERT SECTION

'Difficult issues' remain over Labours apprenticeship policies

It is not only the result of the forthcoming election that is difficult to read; the consequences of voting one way or the other are also rather opaque. This is in part because the major parties are being coy about some very big issues: the Tories won't tell us what they will cut whereas Labour won't tell us when. It is also the case that both are concentrating on the big picture and leaving some very awkward detail to later.

Apprenticeship policy is a good case in point. The Conservatives and Lib Dems have focussed on the numbers of apprenticeships they will create; Labour, in sharp contrast has focussed on what sort. Under Labour the apprenticeship brand will be restricted to provision at level three and above with a minimum duration of two years. This leaves some difficult issues, not least what to do about the large number of apprenticeships at level two, particularly in hairdressing and construction, opportunities that should not lightly be cast aside.

To focus on these operational difficulties however is to miss the point. Labour will clearly find some way to keep this provision for individuals and organisations that need it, most probably by calling it something else. The big point is that apprenticeships are positioned as a route to higher level skills, not as a solution to youth unemployment.

Labour policy takes a similar approach to the role of FE colleges. Their principal role is seen as delivering a high quality vocational route to employment or higher education, organised as a 'Tech Bacc'. Those offering such programmes at acceptable levels of quality will be rebranded as 'institutes of technical education'. The emphasis on 'rigour' is underlined by the proposal that all young people should study English and maths to 18, challenging both in terms of the motivation of young people and the capacity of the system to deliver.

Progression from the Tech Bacc will often be to new 'technical degrees' which under Labour will be developed by

universities, redirecting higher education provision. Unlike the Tories, Labour is not proposing to remove the cap on higher education recruitment which gives it the opportunity to steer where higher education expansion takes place. This is in sharp contrast to coalition policy set out in the 'dual mandate' that sees higher vocational education developed in colleges, presumably at the expense of other FE provision.

A further difficulty in interpreting Labour policy is that it is more concerned to appear 'responsible' in relation to public spending than generous. It has therefore made very little of the fact that in calculating 'the deficit', which it has pledged to reduce year-on-year, it will exclude expenditure that can be counted as investment rather than consumption. This difference in definition could mean that Labour would spend as much as £30bn more on public services than a right wing coalition over the life of a parliament.

Similarly not much has been made of the fact that Labour, like the Lib Dems but unlike the Tories, will ring fence expenditure on 16-to-18 education, as well as on earlier stages of schooling. Labour will take inflation into account (though not changes in pupil numbers) which works to the advantage of the post-16 sector where student numbers are generally static or falling. The post-16 sector will welcome the Labour proposal to reintroduce face-to-face careers guidance for pupils from the age of 11 even though it is unclear where the resources will come from.

Finally, Labour seems committed to devolution of skills policy but is not clear on whether it favours a sectoral or geographical solution. This may be a real dilemma for the party which likes the social partnership model embodied by UKCES (UK Commission on Employment and Skills) but is also keen to return powers to local authorities. It may be on this issue that we just have to wait and see.

Structural changes remain on the agenda

Whether it was a promise to open university technical colleges (UTCs) "within reach" of every English city or a pledge to force coasting schools to become academies, the Conservatives proved with the launch of their manifesto that their commitment to structural change across the education sector is very much alive.

In their manifesto, the Tories have pledged to continue with the structural reform for which they have become famous since 2010. Five hundred new free schools, failing secondary schools becoming academies, UTCs and national colleges are all familiar territory.

But in his speech to launch the party's manifesto at UTC Swindon, Prime Minister David Cameron focused on one of his party's three big announcements — a commitment to double the amount of free childcare available to working parents.

Mr Cameron said: "A good life should mean that raising your family feels like an incredible and joyful and — yes — sometimes exhausting journey, but it shouldn't be a permanent struggle with the bills.

"That's why our second commitment to working people is on childcare. For families with young children, this is not one issue among many — it is the issue. They're asking: how can we make this work? How can we afford it?"

"It shouldn't have to be this way. That's why we're making childcare tax free. It's why we already fund 15 hours of free universal childcare a week for families with three and four-year-olds. And I



can tell you today, we are going further. A lot further."

The additional 15 hours of free childcare will be available only for working parents in both single and double parent households where both parents are working.

Parents will be considered to be working if they earn the equivalent of working eight hours a week on the minimum wage, currently £32.50. It is expected to apply to 630,000 children, on top of the 1.3 million already claiming the universal free 15 hours of childcare.

The £350m cost of the policy, which will be brought in in 2017 if the Tories form a government, will be met by curbing pension relief for higher earners, which is expected to save £1.4bn.

For the FE sector, it seems more change could be on the cards, but not more funding.

The manifesto talks about "continuing to replace lower-level, classroom-based FE courses with high-quality apprenticeships" and a drive to reach the Tories' sought-after goal of three million apprenticeship starts in the next Parliament.

But despite plans to expand the coverage of new institutions such as UTCs and national colleges, a commitment to protect funding for existing FE institutions was conspicuous by its absence.



David Cameron

“Our task is to give the reforms time to bed in and to spread excellence everywhere”

Peter Macdiarmid/AP/Press Association Images

Vote for us — Nicky Morgan writes for FE Week and Schools Week

When politicians, the media and a host of others descended on the Wiltshire town of Swindon, they did so because of the

Prime Minister's desire to put education at the heart of the Conservative Party's plan for Britain's future.

That's why the magnificent UTC Swindon provided the backdrop to our manifesto launch — because providing the best schools and skills for young people is a central part of our long-term economic plan for Britain.

We know that a good education is the wellspring from which the good life flows. It's why we have been so determined not to waste a moment of this parliament turning around a system that was letting too many people down.

Today standards are higher, discipline is stronger and outcomes are better. Employers have more faith in a system that they previously called into question, and young people

know that the qualifications they receive are valuable and will help to set them up for life.

Our task for the next parliament is to consolidate and build on this success: to give the reforms time to bed in and to spread excellence everywhere. That's why our manifesto focuses on building on what has already been shown to work: a focus on the basics, support for teachers, refusal to accept mediocrity. In particular, we talk about making Britain the best place in the world to study maths, science and engineering; ensuring every student has the chance to study an essential academic core at GCSE; and making sure every child leaving primary school has the support and opportunity they need to go on to success in later life.

With five more years, we also plan to build on our successful reforms to post-16 education. One of the first actions we took when we came to government was to commission an independent review into vocational education under

the watchful eye of Professor Alison Wolf, and we have been working through the recommendations of her report ever since.

Professor Wolf found that 350,000 16 to 19-year-olds were receiving poor-quality qualifications that were not valued by employers and did not prepare them for further study. So we have removed thousands of these poorly valued qualifications from league tables and replaced them with high-quality, employer-backed qualifications instead.

We have also introduced the new TechBacc that will be reported for the first time in the college and school sixth-form performance tables in January 2017 to recognise the highest achievements of students undertaking technical education. Our new high-quality traineeships have already helped thousands of young people to get their foot on the route to rewarding work, while we have delivered over two million new apprenticeship starts since 2010 which are helping give our young people

the skills they need to get on and succeed.

And at the same time, new university technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools are helping young people to prepare for work while getting the skills and qualifications they need.

Our ambition for the next five years is to build on this success, with three million new apprenticeships in the next parliament, new UTCs so that there is one within reach of every city, and the successful implementation of the TechBacc measure.

In addition, we want to expand the network of national colleges, building on the call for engagement we conducted last year, to provide high-level technical skills to those industries or sectors where there is an identified skills gap.

This represents a cohesive and comprehensive plan to deliver the best schools and skills so that every young person has the chance to leave education prepared for life in modern Britain."



What the manifesto says

School standards

- Requiring every 11-year-old to know times tables by heart, perform long division and multiplication, read a book and write a short story
- If children do not meet Level four in their 'exams' at the end of primary school, they must resit at secondary school
- Require all pupils to take GCSEs in the 'English Baccalaureate' subjects – English, maths, science, a modern foreign language, and history or geography.
- Limit Ofsted ratings for schools that 'refuse' to offer all Baccalaureate subjects. They will only be able to get a 'good'.

Ensuring school places, with zero tolerance of failure

- Continue to expand academies, free schools, studio schools and University Technical Colleges.
- Open at least 500 new free schools
- Introduce

new powers forcing any school receiving a 'requires improvement' rating to be taken over by new leadership unless it has an improvement plan

School funding

- Allow all good schools to expand, whether maintained schools, academies, free schools or grammar schools.
- Commit £18bn for new school buildings
- Continue to provide the pupil premium protected at current rates
- Continue providing free meals to all infants
- Not allow state schools to make a profit
- Least-well funded authorities have already had increases in funding, and this will be the

baseline for future funding.

Teaching

- Expect every teacher to be trained in serious behaviour and stopping low-level disruption
- Reduce time spent on paperwork
- Introduce bursaries for the most 'in-demand' subject
- Pay good teachers more
- Reduce the 'burden' of Ofsted inspections
- Encourage the growth of Teach First
- Increase the number of teachers able to teach Mandarin
- Support an independent College of Teaching

Maths and science

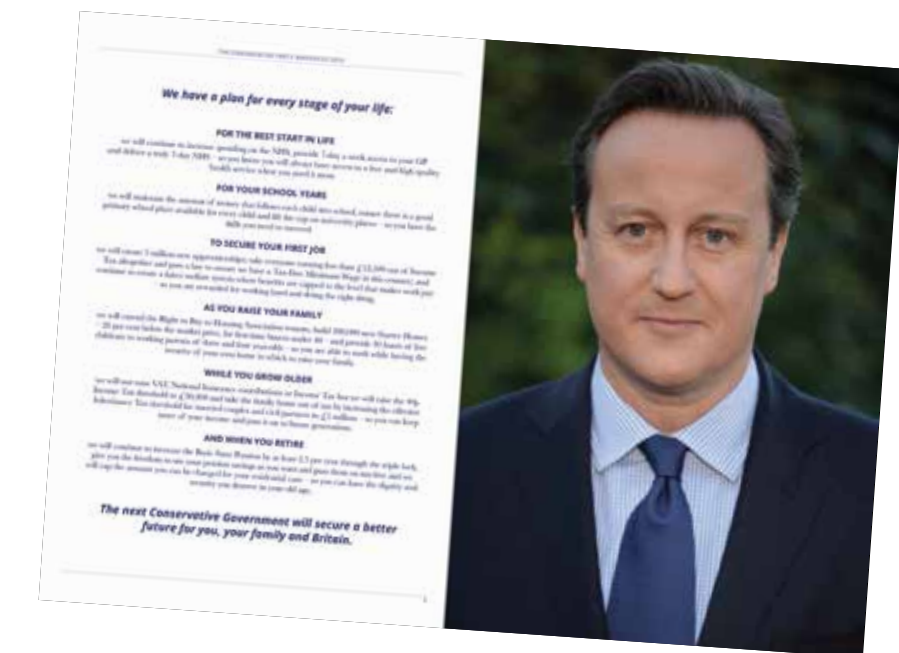
- Train an extra 17,500 maths and physics teachers over the Parliament

Protecting children

- Introduce regional adoption agencies, working across local authorities to match children.
- Expand training programmes for social workers, such as Frontline.
- Continue to tackle all forms of bullying.
- Require age verification for all sites containing pornographic material and age-rating for all music videos.

FE, skills and apprenticeships

- Create 3m new apprenticeship starts over the course of the next parliament.
- Continue to replace lower-level classroom-based FE courses with high-quality apprenticeships.
- Ensure there is a University Technical College within reach of every city in England
- Abolish employers' national insurance contributions on earnings up to the upper earnings limit for apprentices under the age of 25.
- Roll out more degree-level apprenticeships.





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SCHOOLSWEEK

FE Week

Unions rebuff Tory plan for new year 7 tests

If one thing set the Conservatives' plan to introduce testing in English and maths in Year 7 apart from the party's other manifesto pledges, it was its immediate and whole-hearted rejection by several prominent teaching unions.

Both the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and National Union of Teachers rejected several of the Tories' policies, but none as swiftly or as strongly as the proposal that those who don't reach the "required standard" in English and maths by the end of primary school should be tested in their first year of secondary school.

Christine Blower, the general secretary of the NUT, accused the government of having a "legacy of centralised power" and an "obsession with testing" and said it had "narrowed the curriculum", before going on to criticise the new test proposals.

She said: "The Conservative Party's manifesto, aside from more of the same, pledges resits for those beginning secondary school who did not reach level four in Key Stage 2 SATs.

"The last thing that schools or pupils need is yet more high stakes testing. Recent research shows that children are becoming conditioned to the idea of school as a place for exams. Creativity and personal development have been sidelined."

Ms Blower also accused the government of de-skilling the teaching profession, and criticised the academies and free schools programmes.

She said: "In the space of five years, the coalition government has de-skilled the profession by dropping the requirement that teachers should be qualified, atomised the education system so that schools are pitted against one another, and worsened pay and pensions to such an extent that many talented teachers are leaving.

"By enabling the academies and free schools movement, the coalition government has robbed local authorities of the powers to plan and provide school places to meet demand. Instead, we have schools opening where they are not needed and, elsewhere, class sizes are increasing."

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary the ATL, also had strong words about the policy. She said: "Forcing 11-year-olds who do not achieve 'the required standard' at the end of primary school to re-sit SATs in secondary school displays an astounding lack of understanding about how children learn, and will label thousands of children as failures as they start secondary school.

"It suggests the Conservatives care far more about testing than teaching children."

Dr Bousted accused the Tories of failing to mention the "imminent crisis in school places" and criticised plans to convert failing secondary schools into academies, adding: "Converting schools into academies is not a panacea for school improvement. What does work is collaboration between schools, underpinned by effective inspection."

She said the Tory plan to reduce the burden of Ofsted was not supported by firm proposals, and said the party's fixation with STEM subjects demonstrated a "staggeringly narrow understanding" of the range of skills needed by children.

On teachers and teacher training, she added: "In their five years in government, the Conservatives have presided over demoralisation of teachers, a recruitment crisis and increasing numbers of teachers leaving within the early years of their careers.

"Teachers and heads will now need to be convinced that a College of Teaching will be truly independent and avoid short-termism and evidence-free, ideologically-driven policies."



Mary Bousted



Christine Blower

EXPERT

SARAH JONES

Associate at Lkmc



What does the Conservative manifesto promise?

We will maintain the amount of money that follows each child into school..."

With a growing school-age population, many schools will be seeing increasing rolls in the next five years, and this commitment to protect per-pupil funding will be welcome.

However Sam Freedman, director of research, evaluation and impact at Teach First, and previously policy adviser to Michael Gove, has blogged about how this really amounts to a 10 per cent cut in education spending, because the per-pupil amount isn't set to rise in line with inflation, and because of increased pension contributions for schools.

"We will ensure there is a good primary school place for your child, with zero tolerance of failure"

With around 80,000 children missing out on their first preference primary school this week this is a timely promise. The manifesto pledges £7 billion and 500 new free schools in the next parliament to create new places, and the use of academy conversion and new accountability measures to improve the quality of places that already exist.

The manifesto explains the Conservative plan to introduce "tough new standards for literacy and numeracy in primary schools". Nicky Morgan wrote in the Times that headteachers should be sacked if any child failed to pass these new, tougher tests, but this hasn't made it into the manifesto (although perhaps this is what is meant by "zero tolerance of failure"?).

Also missing is anything specific about floor targets, although David Cameron said in a speech in February that the Conservatives were "setting higher standards, so that - at the very least - 85 per cent of a school's pupils reach a good level of attainment, or are on their way to getting there". Of course any threshold attainment measure will sit alongside the new progress measures, if a school chooses to introduce one of the approved baseline assessments for their

reception kids.

The manifesto also confirms that "if children do not reach the required standards in their exams at the end of primary school, they will re-sit them at the start of secondary school, to make sure no pupil is left behind". Most children who don't achieve level 4 (presumably what is meant by "failing" SATs) go on to struggle through secondary school, and it is lovely to hear politicians for once talking about these pupils.

However it's not clear how retaking a test will support them. At best, it could ensure that secondary schools focus even more time and resources on the pupils who start with low previous attainment. At worst, it could narrow the Year 7 curriculum to coaching for yet another high-stakes test, and entrench a fixed mindset in these pupils about their own inability to succeed in English and maths.

"...we will recruit and keep the best teachers by reducing the time they spend on paperwork... [and] further reducing the burden of Ofsted inspections"

Earlier this year the ATL, NAHT, ASCL and NUT joined together to write to Ms Morgan about their "bitter disappointment" at the Workload Challenge response. Teachers and unions may be pleased that the manifesto recognises workload is still an issue, but sadly there is nothing to alleviate their disappointment at the lack of tangible suggestions for improvement.

"We will continue to allow all good schools to expand, whether they are maintained schools, academies, free schools or grammar schools"

In opposition David Cameron wanted the party to "drop the obsession with grammar schools", calling them "divisive", but the manifesto has opened the door to expansions (and probably also new-in-all-but-name grammar schools, such as the Weald of Kent Grammar School annexe in Sevenoaks).

Missing ringfence proposal a source of criticism

With both their main rivals pledging to protect the 16-to-19 education budget in some way, it was inevitable the Tories would come under fire for failing to do so.

Some organisations have been more outspoken than others, but most share the opinion that further cuts to that budget would be devastating for FE.

James Kewin, deputy chief executive of the Sixth Form Colleges' Association, said: "The manifesto tells us we can expect more of the same from a future Conservative government. In simple terms, an unprotected 16 to 19 budget means more funding cuts.

"On the one hand, the Conservatives describe this as one of the "difficult decisions" required to reduce the deficit. But on the other, the manifesto supports the expansion of academies and free schools — institutions that in many cases have proved to be more expensive but less effective versions of sixth form colleges.

"Cutting 16 to 19 funding while investing in vogueish new providers means scarce resources are spread more thinly — this will seriously impede the ability of sixth form colleges to support their students to progress to higher education or employment. A Soviet-style insistence that every new provider must be an academy or free school is not always in the best interests of young people."

A Tory focus on creating three million apprenticeships over the next Parliament also sparked concerns — this time

about the dangers of focusing on quantity.

David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, is among those to have raised concerns, claiming other parts of the sector could suffer.

He said: "The promise of three million new apprenticeships stands out as a commitment for the right reasons but there has to be a question-mark about how quality will be assured for the apprentices as well as the employers.

"The focus on the apprenticeship programme seems to be at the expense of other training opportunities, especially for those who are already in work. Apprenticeships will not fill all the skills shortages and skills gaps on their own.

"As with the other manifestos there is disappointingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, far too little for people already in work or trying to find work to help them get on in their careers and in their lives.

"Millions of new jobs have been created over the past five years but productivity has stagnated and our aging population means we are all going to have longer working lives. We need to develop skills delivery and funding which

supports people to continue to learn to raise productivity and address the skills shortages that need filling now and in the future."

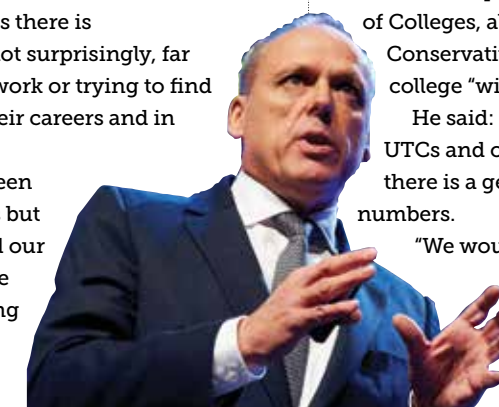
Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal said: "It is great to see the drive to expand the apprenticeship programme but we have cautioned against the chasing of substantial volume targets if it puts at risk the quality of the programme.

"A large expansion of apprenticeships will require a similarly increased investment by the government and employers. It will also need a simplification of the system for funding and controlling the system to allow employers the flexibility to deliver programmes that meet their needs."

Martin Doel (pictured), chief executive of the Association of Colleges, also admitted having misgivings over Conservative plans to open a university technical college "within reach" of every English city.

He said: "They need to ensure that they only allow UTCs and other new schools to be opened where there is a genuine demand to cater for rising pupil numbers.

"We would like to see the Conservatives commit to extending the protective funding ring-fence to include 16 to 18-year-olds, in the same way the other main parties have done."



EXPERT

ALASTAIR THOMSON

FORMER PRINCIPAL POLICY AND ADVOCACY OFFICER AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION AND EX-INFORMATION OFFICER AT THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE



The challenge of 'change versus more of the same'

Political campaigns generally favour challengers over incumbents because the choice boils down to one of 'change versus more of the same'. For the Conservatives in 2015, it is about coming up with compelling policies for the future while also defending and showing continuity with their actions over the past five years.

The way that the Conservatives make their case is to focus the narrative overwhelmingly around a job begun and going in the right direction but one which remains incomplete.

The common analogy is of a patient halfway through an uncomfortable but necessary course of treatment and it seeks to emphasise the government's perceived economic competence (above all, on deficit reduction but also falling unemployment

and rising job numbers). Stressing what has improved during their years in power allows the party to claim, fairly or not, that more time is required to clear up the 'mess' made by their predecessors while side-stepping criticisms that other approaches might have delivered better or quicker results.

This relentless and disciplined focus on responsible stewardship of the economy as an indicator of the security of Conservative government is contrasted to what is characterised as the irresponsible 'tax and spend' policies of other parties. It sends out a clear message of focus and determination but means the manifesto seems curiously lacking in vision and hope.

When it comes to education, the dominant message is one of protecting

school funding per pupil. This is hard to argue against but infuriating for anyone concerned with young people learning outside schools whose funding will suffer. Beyond this, the headlines include a welcome focus on improving standards in maths and, perhaps a less welcome continuation of the structural reforms introduced by Michael Gove. It is no accident that the manifesto was launched at a new UTC college (even if the Daily Telegraph did not appreciate that this was not a traditional 'technical college'). Also the priority attached to expensive and disruptive Free Schools suggests policies driven by ideology as much as evidence.

The manifesto seems curiously lacking in vision and hope

Further and continuing education getting less manifesto attention than schools, universities or early years is hardly surprising and is a charge that can also be levelled at Labour. What is more concerning is that, in the one paragraph on further education, the Conservative

focus is not on improving or reforming the existing college sector but on new "National Colleges, which will provide specialist higher-level vocational training in sectors critical to economic growth".

The same paragraph promises publication of more earnings and destination data for further education courses but makes no mention of improving independent careers advice and guidance.

It is understandable that the Conservatives want to promote apprenticeships as the main alternative to higher education but it is disingenuous to gloss over the reluctance/inability of many employers to engage with the sometimes necessary bureaucracy of quality apprenticeships and also the poor record of schools in preparing large numbers of young people for apprenticeships or workplace learning.

Perhaps the saddest thing about this manifesto though, is that there is so little recognition of the role of learning in promoting social mobility and in raising aspirations. When appointed Conservative minister for FE in 2010, one of the first things John Hayes said was that 'Education is not the filling of the pail but the lighting of a fire'. It seems that for this election, the Conservatives are not following the old US political adage to govern in prose but 'campaign in poetry'.

'Cradle to college' funding makes front page

The Liberal Democrats focused on funding as education made the front page of their manifesto.

As the two largest parties fought it out over structural reform and a numbers race on apprenticeships, the Lib Dems chose instead to make one of the more significant pledges of the short campaign — an increase in funding for two to 19 education.

Their pledge — to factor both inflation and rising school numbers into education budgets over the next Parliament — will have ticked a lot of boxes for both the FE and schools sectors, but also led to inevitable questions about whether the same protection would be afforded to post-19 education funding.

Another big question which hung over everything the Liberal Democrats announced at their manifesto launch, held in a Battersea warehouse, was whether they could be trusted following the tuition fees crisis which followed the last election.

But in an interview with Schools Week and FE Week following the manifesto launch, education minister and Lib Dem policy committee chair David Laws confirmed that increased education spending would be a "red line" for any coalition involvement after May 7.

He said: "I can't contemplate us wanting to go into coalition in the next parliament unless we deliver what's on the front page of this document, and the education funding pledge we are making is precisely one of those."

"We are incredibly passionate about education, not just because of economic growth but because of social justice. We need this extra money to make sure not just that we protect education, but that we can deliver the real improvements in the early years with more one-to-one tuition."

"So the fact we have put it on the front page of the manifesto, this is something we would expect to deliver in coalition in the next parliament."

On the subject of post-19 funding, Mr Laws said the party's pledge to "balance the books" by 2017/18 meant it would have more cash available.

He said: "Because we are doing something very different from the Tories after 2017/18, which is growing public spending in line with the growth of the economy, it's going to mean we have got much more money than the Tories for areas such as that."

"I would aspire to that (increase in post-19 education funding) but I can't promise it because we are defining our pledges in the terms we have defined them here today."



Since the manifesto launch, the Lib Dems have joined the apprenticeships numbers race they had initially seemed keen to stay out of, announcing that they, like the Tories, would create 3m apprenticeship starts in the next Parliament.

Business Secretary Vince Cable announced last week that a Liberal Democrat government would push starts past the 3m by 2020 by giving out 200,000 extra apprenticeship grants for employers (AGE) and continuing with government plans to scrap employer national insurance contributions for apprentices under 25.

The Lib Dems claim they will use the incentives to double the number of businesses hiring apprentices, from 180,000 to 360,000, by the end of the next parliament, which they say will lead to a rise in the number of starts per year to 600,000 a year by 2019/20.

Dr Cable said: "The world is changing at an accelerated rate and we need equip our young people with the skills they need for the future, to ensure they can compete in a global market place, in ever changing technologies and the digital economy. "That is why the Liberal Democrats will double the number of employers providing apprenticeships over the next five years and create more apprenticeship starts per year than Germany."

"To achieve these objectives requires significant investment in skills by both government and the private sector. As we grow our economy, the Liberal Democrats believe we must enhance adult skills training and our FE colleges."



David Laws

“We have got to make sure the money is there to educate the population”

Vote for us — highlights from Nick Clegg's manifesto launch speech

“We cut taxes for millions of working people and lifted the lowest paid out of tax altogether.”

We directed more funding to the poorest children in our schools.

The Liberal Democrats will add a heart to a Conservative government and a brain to a Labour one. We won't allow the Conservatives to cut too much and jeopardise our schools and hospitals and we won't allow Labour to borrow too much and risk our economy again.

When we formed the coalition in 2010, three quarters of our manifesto became part of the government's agenda. The priorities on its front page: fairer taxes; investment in the poorest children in schools; fixing the economy; and

political reform, became central to what the coalition government did.

We can say we will invest in education because we have protected schools funding and created the Pupil Premium in government.

We have got to make sure the money is there to educate the population, it's as simple as that. And that means doing two things. It means keeping up with prices, keeping up with inflation, in terms of the money put into the education system, and keeping up with the number of children going into our education system.

Now, the Conservative Party have said they will do one, but not the other, in other words they will increase spending in line with pupil numbers but not with prices. That's

a cut in real-terms for schools and colleges and nurseries. And the Labour Party have said they will do the other one and not the other, so they will keep up with prices and not pupil numbers. So that's another cut.

Our plans are to do both. To keep up with prices. That means that by the end of the next Parliament we will have spent £5bn more on our education system than the Conservatives and £2.5bn more than the Labour Party. And that, I think, is essential.

Education is the catalyst, it's the engine of social mobility. If you believe in opportunity, you can't

deliver opportunity on the cheap. You have got to invest in education. Short-changing schools, short-changing nurseries, cutting money to colleges, which is what the Labour and Conservative parties imply, is short-changing future generations, and Liberal Democrats will not do that.



What the manifesto says

School standards

- Requiring every 11-year-old to School standards
- Protect the education budget in real terms from the early years to age 19
- Protect the schools' Pupil Premium in real terms and introduce a fair National Funding Formula
- Provide support and intervention to ensure that all schools become good or outstanding
- Expand the Talented Head Teachers programme
- Increase the number of Teaching Schools
- Ensure there is a democratically accountable 'middle tier' to support schools where problems are identified.
- Introduce a local Head Teacher Board, working with schools and local authorities
- Abolish unelected Regional School Commissioners
- Rule out state-funded profit-making schools
- Give local authorities responsibility for local school-place planning
- Only fund new mainstream schools in areas where school places are needed.
- Repeal the rule that all new state-funded schools must be free schools or academies
- Allow local authorities to select the school sponsor, where this is not the local authority itself
- Ensure a fair local schools admissions process
- Implement the Children's Commissioner's report They Go The Extra Mile
- Extend free school meals to all children in primary education.

Teaching

- Guarantee all teachers in state-funded schools will be fully qualified or working towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) from September 2016
- Introduce a clear and properly funded entitlement to professional development for all teachers
- Raise the bar for entry to the profession, requiring a B grade minimum in GCSE maths and English
- Establish a new profession-led Royal College of Teachers, eventually to oversee QTS and professional development.
- Continue to support the Teach First programme
- Establish a new National Leadership Institute
- Encourage primary schools to have at least one science specialist
- Curriculum and qualifications

- Ensure the core curriculum will be taught at every state-funded school
- Establish an independent Educational Standards Authority (ESA) entirely removed from Ministerial interference responsible for curriculum and examination standards
- Introduce a minimum curriculum entitlement — a slimmed down core national curriculum, which will be taught in all state-funded schools
- This will include PSHE, financial literacy, first aid and emergency lifesaving skills, citizenship, and age-appropriate sex and relationship education
- Religious education will be included in the core curriculum
- Improve careers advice in schools and colleges

Apprenticeships

- Double the number of employers offering apprenticeships, from 180,000 to 360,000
- Extend the apprenticeship grant for employers (AGE), delivering 200,000 extra payouts
- Expanding the number of degree-level higher apprenticeships
- Work with the apprenticeship advisory group to increase the number of apprentices from BAME backgrounds
- Ensure gender balance across industry sectors, and encourage underrepresented groups to apply

FE and lifelong learning

- Develop National Colleges as national centres of expertise for key sectors to deliver high-level skills
- Establish a cross-party commission to secure a long-term settlement for the public funding of reskilling and lifelong learning
- Review the VAT treatment of general FE colleges and sixth form colleges to ensure fair treatment in relation to the schools sector

Support for young adults

- A new young person's discount card for those aged 16 to 21, giving a 2/3 discount on bus travel, as resources allow
- Enable government departments, councils and businesses to add other offers to the card
- Review access to transport for students and apprentices in rural areas where no scheduled services are available
- Improve links between employers and schools

SCHOOLSWEEK

FE Week

Lib Dems hampered by coalition record

Support for certain policies within the Liberal Democrat manifesto doesn't seem to have been enough to build trust back up for at least two of the country's teaching unions.

Both the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) responded to the manifesto by attacking the Lib Dems' record in government.

But the underlying mistrust of the party did not stop both unions from welcoming several pledges.

NUT general secretary Christine Blower said: "Manifestos can be swept aside in coalition, as we have seen, but we welcome the Liberal Democrats' prioritisation of education funding."

"We also welcome the Liberal Democrats' commitment to putting a qualified teacher in every classroom."

She said the government had sent out a "terrible message" to teachers in training when it removed the requirement for qualified teacher status in 2012, adding: "The NUT wants to see every child taught by a qualified teacher, for every lesson, every day, and we know that the vast majority of parents agree with us."

Ms Blower said education spending should be a priority for any government, but said it was an "inescapable fact" that the coalition government did not protect it and the

Liberal Democrats reneged on their tuition fee pledge.

She said: "It is a matter of urgency that whichever party or parties forms the next government restores education funding in England and Wales to the levels necessary to protect education funding in real terms, taking account of increases in pupil numbers and cost pressures including the impact of pension contribution and NI increases."

"It is imperative that any new government restores the funding lost, including in post-16 education and local authority education services. It must restore the cuts in teachers' pay since 2010. Securing funding and VAT parity for sixth form colleges is desperately needed. We also need to increase education funding to the levels needed to secure a first class education system."

"With a shortage of school places, and a developing crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, there can be no greater priority for our politicians than to address the problems in education funding."

Chris Keates, General Secretary of the NASUWT, said: "The Liberal Democrat manifesto contains many ideas that teachers could support, but unfortunately their record in

delivering for education during the last five years indicates that they will not keep their promises and very few policies will be implemented next time."

Ms Keates added that many of the policies in the manifesto were "similar to those proposed in 2010, which were not delivered".

She added: "Teachers, parents and children and young people know that coalition policies in the last five years have had a detrimental effect on education and that if the Liberal Democrats had not entered the government, the Conservatives would not have been enabled to carry out their vicious assault upon public services and the downgrading of teacher status, which has led to one of the worst recruitment and retention crises for a generation."



Chris Keates

EXPERT



RUSSELL HOBBY

General secretary of the National Association of Headteachers

Lovely policies, harsh realities

It is a tough gig for the Liberal Democrats that a party which genuinely seems to want (and need, see below) teachers to support them is indelibly connected to a broken promise on tuition fees and the coalition's attack on the profession.

This is reflected in a precipitate decline in their support among teachers. This is a situation few parties could afford to ignore given their half million-strong numbers (and a situation which the Conservatives certainly did not ignore when reshuffling Michael Gove from education to the chief whip's office.)

Support for the Lib Dems has fallen from 23 per cent of those teachers who expressed a preference in 2010 (Ipsos Mori) to just 10 per cent in 2015 (YouGov, TES). Most of this support has gone to the Labour Party. Labour will, of course,

have been on a low in 2010 as the party in power.

It is easy to forget that Ed Balls was barely more popular than Michael Gove but my first experience of education politics was a massive row with him at the 2010 NAHT conference.

Labour is now the opposition and has made the right noises on qualified teacher status (QTS) and free schools. Still, it is a staggering example of the price paid for forcing through reform, although the Lib Dems may be disappointed that they are picking up the bill.

Recently, both Nick Clegg and David Laws have attempted to build bridges. With Clegg saying on Monday, for example that: "Having wasted a lot of time dealing with a lot of zany ideological gimmicks from Michael Gove and his team, I think it would be a good thing if

the Liberal Democrats were able to run education policy on our terms."

The Lib Dem manifesto also prioritises education and education funding in a way which neither of the other parties have done. The Conservatives will track pupil numbers, Labour will track inflation and the Lib Dems will track both.

Indeed, perhaps the biggest criticism of their current education policies is just how lovely they are. They express great aspirations; it is harder to see how they could be achieved in a world where their funding pledges are just the opening bid in a complex negotiation for power in an era of continuing austerity.

Yet to dismiss them solely as warm words would be short-sighted. It is not impossible to imagine David Laws as a future Secretary of State in either a right or left leaning coalition. And their time in government has also produced a sober, reflective and pragmatic assessment which has gone down well with many school leaders and teachers in the recent conference season. So what might the Lib Dems bring to the table?

We could start by looking at what they'd do with all that money. In power, they'd protect the pupil premium, argue for the extension of free school meals to all primary age children and for a national funding formula.

Without them, I suspect the pupil premium may be at risk - or at least recalculated - but even with the Lib

Dems in government a genuine national funding formula risks going the way of proportional representation. The most likely combination to deliver it is, perhaps surprisingly, a repeat of the Conservative-Lib Dem pact.

It is not impossible to imagine David Laws as a future Secretary of State

The Lib Dems share with Labour their support for QTS, for leadership development, compulsory sex and relationship education (although they include PSHE as a whole) and for a reformed middle tier.

They share with all three parties a carefully understated commitment to reform Ofsted, support for a college of teaching and the read on get on campaign goals for literacy at age eleven.

They are an outlier on the role of local government in education - offering it the most support of any party. They even propose letting LAs choose academy sponsors. They also pay the most attention to early years and make the most concrete offer to reduce the politicisation of education, with their education standards agency.

Funding for 16 to 19 an easy win but misgivings elsewhere

The Liberal Democrat pledge of extra funding for 16 to 19 education certainly hasn't lost the party any friends in the FE sector, but other elements of its manifesto have led to misgivings for some sector leaders.

The pledge to protect funding "from cradle to college" has been welcomed across the board, but Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel is among those to have called on the party to go further.

He said: "Simply protecting the current allocations from further cuts and [check] freezing won't ensure a sustainable and balanced system. "For this reason, we have been arguing that the next government, of whatever colour or colours, will need to carry out a once-in-a-generation review across all education funding to make sure it is being used most effectively and fairly."

"In this context we are therefore very pleased that the Liberal Democrats have committed to a series of cross-party commissions on issues such as lifelong learning, national colleges and a review of VAT rules for sixth form and further education colleges."

The proposed review of VAT rules has also been welcomed by the Sixth Form Colleges Association, which has long campaigned for parity between its members and schools over what it calls the "learning tax".

Deputy chief executive James Kewin said: "The Liberal Democrats, like Labour, are promising to protect the 16 to 19 budget in real terms. But they have gone a step further by pledging to review the VAT treatment of sixth form colleges and FE colleges to ensure fair treatment in relation to schools and academies."

"This is a very welcome step and shows that the party understands how damaging and unfair the learning tax is."

"Plans to establish an independent educational standards authority to keep ministers away from curriculum content and examination standards are long overdue and the young person's discount card will help students in rural areas who can struggle to meet the costs of travelling to college."

The party's pledge on increasing apprenticeship numbers has led to a familiar argument from the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, which has not shied away from making its

feelings on the potential impact of funding reforms on growth in this area.

Chief executive Stewart Segal said: "We share the ambition to significantly increase the number of employers offering apprenticeships but doubling the number will mean that we have to get the current reforms for the programme right in terms of not creating potential barriers against employer engagement such as mandatory cash contributions and adding complexity to the system."

But Mr Segal welcomed plans for a cross-party commission on the future of funding for adult learning, which has also been heralded by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (Niace).

Mr Segal said: "AELP is a firm supporter of learning being available for people of all ages and so a cross-party commission looking into the issue at a time when public expenditure will remain very tight is a sensible approach but must obviously include training providers in the discussions."

Niace chief executive David Hughes said: "The next government has to find ways to deliver and fund skills and training for people over 19 because our economy needs to address productivity deficits and we already have too many skills shortages which will damage any chance of inclusive growth."

"A commission would provide the stability and certainty colleges and training providers need to invest for the future. Another sensible proposal is the support for low-paid workers to progress at work through tailored in-work careers and job search advice."

"Their proposals for more devolution of skills and employment support are right, but we need to understand how they might work in practice."



James Kewin

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Lib Dems' proposed expansion of Apprenticeship Grants doesn't solve UK's vocational education problem

The Liberal Democrats' focus on apprenticeships is not surprising: they have been shown to deliver high wage increases for those who do them, and are considered a model of success in many other countries such as Switzerland or Germany.

The strategy focuses on extending the Apprenticeship Grant for Employers (AGE 16 to 24) scheme by 200,000 over the next parliament. The grant, a cash payment of £1,500 per apprentice hired, was introduced by the coalition government in 2012 to incentivise small firms to take on apprentices. The proposed policy would cost about £300m, which is nearly half the adult apprenticeship budget for 2015/16.

Initially, this targeted grant was introduced with good reason: until 2012, only about 13 per cent of employers in the UK offered formal apprenticeships and about half of these were with larger firms, according to a report published by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) in 2012.

The potential for growth in apprenticeships was identified mainly among small firms. In light of the rapid rise in apprenticeship numbers among people aged 24 and over — representing 40 per cent of the 2.2 million apprenticeships started between 2009/10 and 2013/14 — the grant targeted younger people and accounts for about 20 per cent of all apprenticeship starts for 16 to 24-year-olds since its introduction in February 2012.

Expanding AGE 16 to 24 makes sense if the inability to afford apprenticeships is one of the main constraints facing small firms. What the UKCES report showed, however, was that only 10 per cent of employers said that "high cost" were the reason why they did not hire apprentices. Unavailability of apprenticeships for the particular industry (15 per cent) and unsuitability of apprenticeships for the business (14 per cent) were more

important drivers for deciding not to offer them.

There is no evidence yet as to the quality of the apprenticeships that have been created under the scheme and what benefits they bring to students. While the government has introduced reforms to improve quality, it is not clear how small firms will be able to meet new requirements on minimum hours of employment and paying the apprenticeship minimum wage, both for time spent at the workplace and in the classroom.

The Liberal Democrats have made a pledge to increase the education budget for two to 19-year-olds by £2.5bn if elected, but no details as to which portion of this would go to FE have been given, leaving the sector vulnerable to further cuts. And while the manifesto mentions "reskilling and lifelong learning", no policies are proposed for those aged 24-plus, despite the huge shortcomings in basic literacy and numeracy among the UK adult population recently highlighted by the OECD.

Overall, the Liberal Democrats have shown commitment to the further advancement of apprenticeships and their manifesto contains a concrete proposal as to how to achieve this. The question is whether the expansion of the apprenticeship grant is the right policy to create more and higher quality apprenticeships.

While there is plenty of evidence that for too long a myriad of short, low quality vocational courses have been offered to students, massively expanding apprenticeships over a short time horizon is a questionable solution. Many pupils who leave compulsory education with low achievements would benefit from intense full-time FE courses to prepare them for high quality, higher-level apprenticeships or higher education, but these alternative routes remain unmentioned.

Sectors promised return to local authorities

Huge structural and funding reform would be in store for education and skills if the Green Party formed a government, with plans to return all schools and colleges to local authority control and pump billions into the sector.

Green leader Natalie Bennett proclaimed austerity had "failed" when she launched the manifesto at the Arcola Theatre, in Dalston, East London, this month, and the document indicates the party would not hold back in reversing said austerity.

Claiming the UK needed a "peaceful political revolution", Ms Bennett added: "Our manifesto is an unashamedly bold plan to create a more equal, more democratic society while healing the planet from the effects of an unstable, unsustainable economy."

Under Green plans, class sizes would be reduced to 20, compulsory education would begin at seven years old, while SATs and league tables would be abolished and children would be offered "free, nutritious lunches, with local and GM-free ingredients".

The party has pledged to re-introduce education maintenance allowance for 16 and 17-year-olds would be re-introduced and the FE sector would get an extra £1.5bn in funding every year.

The manifesto document says: "Education should be at the heart of communities, and should promote social and emotional well-being, equality, inclusion and responsibility. Schools need more freedom to frame the curriculum around the needs and interests of the young people in the school."

"There should be an emphasis on pupil-centred learning, which caters for different learning styles, interests and needs."

The Association of Colleges has welcomed plans to invest in the FE sector, but has opposed the Green policy of returning colleges to council control.

Chief executive Martin Doel said: "The Green Party has ambitious plans to invest in the sector as well as ensuring that young people have access to technical and professional education and training, including apprenticeships."

"However, colleges must remain autonomous if they

Green leader Natalie Bennett



are to provide the education and skills training which meets the need of their local community.

"We are pleased to see a pledge to restore the education maintenance allowance as this

would be of great benefit to students from disadvantaged backgrounds."

The Association of Employment and Learning Providers

was just as pleased with promises of extra cash.

Chief executive Stewart Segal said: "We are pleased that the Greens are concerned about the overall level of funding for the FE and skills sector, especially as the sector can play a significant role in bringing down youth unemployment after the election."

"On apprenticeships, the proportion on offer to people over 25 is already falling, but the need for adults to reskill in a rapidly changing economy means that AELP strongly believes that an all age, all level and all sector apprenticeship programme should continue to receive government support."

What the manifesto says

- A comprehensive system of local schools offering mixed-ability teaching and staffed by qualified teachers, and the integration of grammar schools, free schools and academies into the comprehensive system
- Restoring education current and capital funding to 2010 levels in real terms (costing around £7bn a year), distributed to councils, which will be free to decide how it is spent
- Action to reduce teacher workload and introduce professional pay levels for all teachers
- Class sizes of 20, costing £1.5bn over the Parliament.
- Academic learning from six years old, with earlier years education focusing on play, social cohesion and confidence-building, and compulsory education beginning at age seven
- The abolition of SATs and league tables and the evaluation of schools by parents, teachers and the local community, not Ofsted, which would be abolished
- The right for every child who is disabled to a mainstream education
- The removal of charitable status from private schools, with a view to absorbing them into the state system, but nevertheless ensuring that no schools are run for profit.
- Phased out public funding of schools run by religious organisations. Schools may

- teach about religions, but should not encourage adherence to any particular religious beliefs
- Home education and flexi-schooling.
- Free nutritious lunches, with local and GM-free ingredients.
- Ensuring that all schools that serve particular vulnerable communities, for example the Jewish, Muslim or Sikh communities, are adequately protected from sectarian attacks
- Return FE colleges to local government control
- Reverse the trend whereby 45 per cent of apprenticeships are taken by people over 25.
- Reinstate government's duty to provide apprenticeships to all qualified young people aged 16-19 who do not have one and want one, but extend it to age 25, and increase funding for apprenticeships by 30 per cent
- Restore the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16 and 17-year-olds.
- Provide the FE sector with £1.5bn a year extra funding
- Encourage local authorities to use extra money given to them to restore a full range of local adult education programmes
- Allow FE colleges and sixth form colleges to reclaim VAT, costing around £170m a year

Ukip pledge return to school selection

More grammar schools, a close eye on "British values" legislation, smaller classes, scrapping tests and apprenticeships from 14 are among the policies proposed by the United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip).

The party wants to scrap teachers' performance-related pay and decrease paperwork for those on the front line. It also wants to make it easier for schools to convert into grammar schools and vocational institutions.

The proposed expansion of the grammar schools network is a key Ukip policy, and force with which the party has campaigned for it has led to mounting pressure on education secretary Nicky Morgan from Tory MPs to approve new grammar schools, with a specific campaign for a new site in Kent.

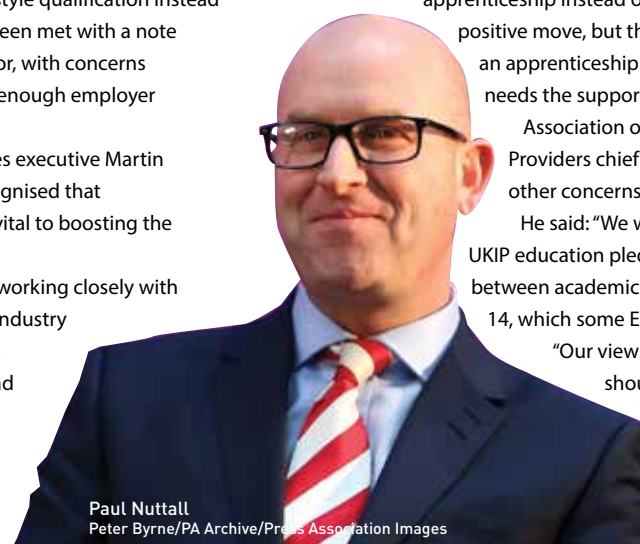
Under a Ukip government, sex education would be banned in primary schools, first aid training would be compulsory in secondary schools and the party would aim to "monitor British values, but with a view towards combatting extremism and radicalisation, rather than criticising widely-held Judeo-Christian beliefs".

The party's education spokesperson, Paul Nuttall MEP, said: "UKIP's vision for British education is of a world-renowned system, a system designed to allow young people to perform to the best of their ability, regardless of background, gender, race, wealth or class."

The suggestion that 14-year-olds be offered the chance to take an apprenticeship-style qualification instead of non-core GCSEs has been met with a note of caution in the FE sector, with concerns that there might not be enough employer involvement.

Association of Colleges executive Martin Doel said: "UKIP has recognised that vocational education is vital to boosting the UK economy."

"Colleges are already working closely with both local and national industry to provide students with high quality technical and professional education and training which gives them valuable employability skills."



Paul Nuttall
Peter Byrne/PA Archive/Press Association Images

Ukip leader Nigel Farage



Gareth Fuller/PA Wire/Press Association Images

"UKIP's pledge to offer students the choice of an apprenticeship instead of four non-core GCSEs is a positive move, but the party must remember that an apprenticeship is a job, plus training, which needs the support of an employer."

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal raised other concerns.

He said: "We would be concerned if the UKIP education pledge meant an either/or choice between academic and vocational learning at age 14, which some European systems encourage."

"Our view is that the 14 to 19 curriculum should allow students a choice of combining learning options as well as starting a full apprenticeship or traineeship at 16."



What the manifesto says

- Decrease paperwork for teachers
- Enforce current restriction on class sizes to 30 pupils and aim to reduce to 25.
- Scrap teachers' performance-related pay
- Abolish "destructive" key stage one SATs
- Require every primary school to nominate (and train, if necessary) a science leader.
- Abolish sex and relationship education at primary school, with a requirement that parents be made fully aware of the sex education teaching materials being used before their children see it at secondary school
- Ensure a range of different types of school, including grammar, vocational, technical and specialist secondary schools, operate within each geographical area
- Give existing secondary schools the opportunity to become grammar schools, with a goal of a grammar school in every town
- Allow other establishments to become vocational schools or colleges similar to those promoted in Germany and The Netherlands
- Link vocational schools and colleges with industry, with an option for students to take an apprenticeship qualification instead of four non-core GCSEs
- Reintroduce the intermediate tier at GCSE mathematics
- Abolish the AS-level exam as a stepping stone to a full A-level, while retaining it as a

- standalone qualification in its own right
- Make first aid training a statutory part of personal, social and health education (PSHE) in the national curriculum
- Fund all secondary schools according to a single formula, taking into account special educational needs, to ensure underfunding such as that for secondary moderns in the 1950s can never be repeated
- Reverse the "policy of closing special schools"
- Ofsted inspections will be streamlined to focus on the quality of teaching, learning and the overall wellbeing of children, rather than paperwork, school policies or tick-box targets
- Monitor British values, but with a "view towards combatting extremism and radicalisation, rather than criticising widely-held Judeo-Christian beliefs".
- Teachers with at least fifteen years' successful classroom experience will be prioritised when Ofsted inspectors are recruited
- Additional investigations by Ofsted if 25 per cent of parents or governors present a petition to the Department for Education
- An independent body will hear complaints about an Ofsted inspection, removing Ofsted's right to investigate itself

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