

Comparing Manifestos - Part 1

In the run up to this May's general election, Schools Week will analyse the manifestos of various education organisations, typically from opposite ends of the political spectrum. This first pre-election manifesto comparison is between Policy Exchange and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

POLICY EXCHANGE

Think-tank Policy Exchange launched its manifesto today – but claims it is not one in the “traditional sense” as it attempts to attract attention from all political parties. It is the first time Policy Exchange, which was established in 2002, has produced such a document ahead of an election.

The non-profit group has strong right-leaning links – it was set up by a group including former education secretary Michael Gove, current education minister Nick Boles MP and cabinet office minister Francis Maude. Its current chairman is conservative Republican David Frum, a Canadian-American.

In launching the document, the group said: “It is our hope and our belief that any or all of [the manifesto ideas] could be taken up by any main political party in May 2015, and they complement the broader policy recommendations we have put forward in our published reports.”

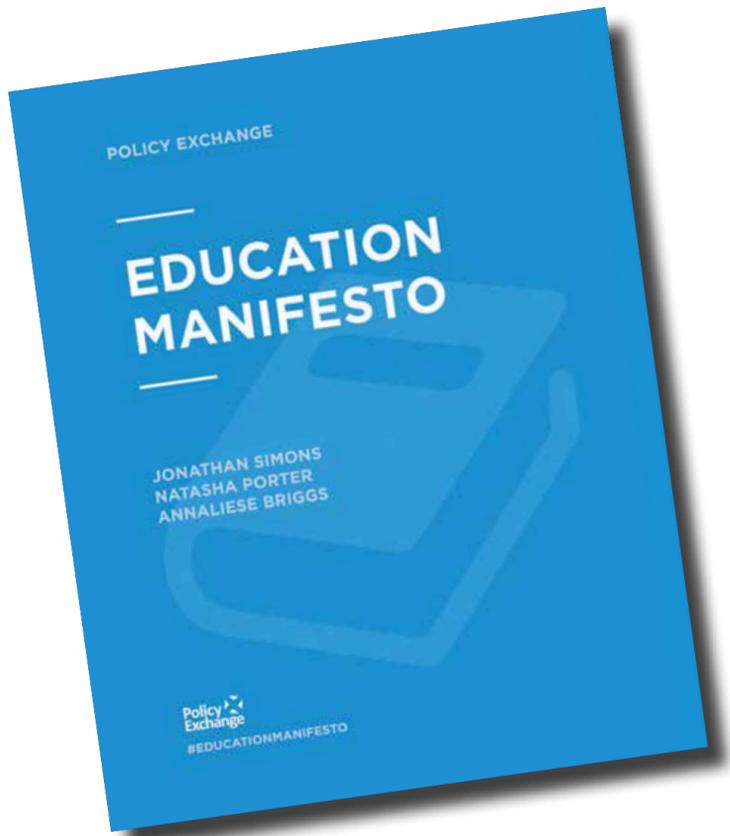
It adds there is a need to “address specific issues”. Policy Exchange believes its key manifesto points, while covering a broad range of topics, all focus on improving the quality of the education system and making sure everyone gets the best possible education.



Policy Exchange said the state of the education system has “reached a point of no return” when it comes to autonomy from government and its underlying message is about “freedom” in the system.

The think-tank wants the next parliament to address “big questions”. These include a focus on the accountability system, making sure it drives improvement and does not prevent innovation in schools, as well as asking what role the government has in recruiting, developing and training the education workforce.

However, it warns that declining teacher numbers and increasingly indebted graduates could lead to further problems in recruitment and its first two points seek to address these issues.



ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is a trade union which supports more than 170,000 professionals across the country.

Its manifesto was launched last May in the House of Commons, a year ahead of the general election.

It was shaped by the views, experiences and opinions of its members, put together at regional conferences when ATL members were asked “what really mattered to them” and “what were their hopes for education”. Views also came from workplace visits and branch meetings.

More than 1,000 members contributed after attending such events.

The manifesto, ATL says, is one element of its Shape Education campaign which has involved ATL members writing to their MPs, attending MPs’ surgeries and debating the issues raised in the manifesto at conferences, continued professional development events and ATL meetings.

The union wants to use this manifesto



to “engage” with decision-makers and influencers in all political parties. The union wants its ideas to be “woven” into those parties’ own manifestos.

ATL hopes to engage the public and policymakers by using the hashtag #ShapeEducation on social media site Twitter.

The union also plans on holding more events in the run up to the May election to debate policy ideas with MP candidates in a bid to “inform members’ votes”.

WHAT THE LEADERS SAY



Jonathan Simons, head of education at Policy Exchange, said: “People choose to go into teaching for a number of reasons. But as the economy continues to grow there are lots of jobs becoming available including some with much higher starting salaries.

“There is a risk that increased student debt combined with the additional cost

of teacher training and the relatively low starting salary will be off-putting to prospective teachers.

Offering to cover student loan payments is a visible sign of the Government’s support for the profession and may also act to keep people in the classroom.

“It’s also imperative that our education system provides everyone with the best possible chance to have a secure job which gives them a decent standard of living.

“In a modern day economy, mastery of maths is increasingly important, as is the opportunity to retrain and develop skills throughout your working life.”

MANIFESTO POINTS

1. Introduce a repayment-of-student-loan scheme for teachers in state schools
2. Create a plan of local area support to attract teachers to schools and regions across the country
3. Require all students to study maths up until the age of 18
4. Increase the role of schools in early years services
5. Improve the quality of education for looked-after children

TO WHICH PARTY ARE THEY CLOSEST

One would expect a manifesto put out by Policy Exchange to be closest in alliance with the Conservative party given its right-wing founders.

Its requirement for maths up to the age of 18 is an issue all three main political parties have already agreed upon.

However, as stated in its opening address, this has been put together without any political allegiance in mind, in the hope any party can take up its points.

As a non-profit organisation it cannot support or promote any particular party, and this document clearly makes sure Policy Exchange does not promote any of its supporters or donors.

It could open the doors for Policy Exchange to align itself with alternative political groups.

MANIFESTO POINTS

1. Seek a broad and balanced curriculum focusing on skills development as well as academic excellence
2. Transition from school to FE, HE and work needs financial support and excellent careers guidance
3. Education and students’ futures need to be prioritised over profit
4. Education professionals need an end to excessive working hours and a genuine career path through a national pay structure and CPD
5. Schools need an accountability system based on collaboration, with local inspection arrangements and a new role for Ofsted

TO WHICH PARTY ARE THEY CLOSEST

As a union, it is expected that ATL’s manifesto would share similar values to that of the Labour party.

The biggest comparison is the focus on the curriculum and careers advice, with both ATL and the Labour party calling for “broad curriculums” and a much-improved careers advice service.

It touches upon issues which both education secretary Nicky Morgan and deputy prime minister Nick Clegg have already attempted to address – teachers’ workload.

WHAT THE LEADERS SAY



Mary Boustead

ATL’s manifesto is critical of the coalition government’s education policies over the last five years.

It hits out at the curriculum changes and exam reforms, as well as the academies and free school programme – particularly in relation to financial mismanagement highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee.

Dr Mary Boustead said: “So many exams are taken that the system is creaking. Schools have lost faith in the ability of exam boards to award the right grades and appeals have risen.

“Yet the coalition government’s return to an overreliance on testing through final exams, which will assess just a small part of pupils’ achievements, and its drive to promote a narrowly academic curriculum will ignore the skills and attributes young people need and skills that employers say

they need: communication and analytical skills; IT skills, creativity; interpersonal skills; resilience; a strong work ethic and empathy.”

But it is not just the government which the union wants to address. Ofsted is on its lips too.

Dr Boustead said: “Ofsted has a credibility problem with the profession and with politicians – the agency is no longer trusted to make accurate and reliable judgements on individual schools. Ofsted needs radical reform.”

She adds: “ATL proposes a new approach to inspection, one tailored to school improvement, proportionate in its impact; working with, not against teachers; conducted by experts in the subject/age phase being inspected and resulting in judgements that are valid and reliable.”