

WA BRIEFING

What does the Conservative Party manifesto mean for the education sector?

19th May 2017

INTRODUCTION AND ANALYSIS

Education in the Conservative Party manifesto is inherently tied to removing social divisions, with the Government pledging to address “long-ignored” problems such as the lack of training and technical education. This wider narrative and ethos about providing opportunity for all is critical to understanding the Tories’ approach to education, just as education reform is critical to their ambitions for society.

In many ways, however, this manifesto is anything but ‘strong and stable’ for the education sector. Almost every part of the education sector will face change.

Yet more upheaval lies ahead for universities with a proposed comprehensive review of tertiary education. The manifesto outlines a renewed expectation on employers to upskill and retrain workers for the future, whilst making some significant changes to the details of delivery. Meanwhile, it proposes unshackling selective schools with – of course – the party’s headline-grabbing grammar schools policy.

The policies are unlikely to delight every part of the sector. The Party’s pledge to ensure that Britain’s world-class universities can continue to attract international students and to bring more scientists into the UK seems to run contrary to their commitment to crack down on immigration. The manifesto doesn’t just re-confirm Theresa May’s refusal to remove students from immigration figures, it goes even further than the status quo, with a pledge to “toughen the visa requirements for students, to make sure that we maintain high standards”.

As a whole, the manifesto veers away from the traditionally pro-business stance that the Conservatives took under Cameron. Yet surprise concessions have been made on apprenticeships in recognition of the cries of pain emanating from the business community over the implementation of the levy, likely to grow in volume as economic challenges hit. After major upheaval in the apprenticeships sector over the last two years, measures to ease the financial burden on levy payers by allowing levy funds to be spend on wages under a nation retraining scheme will be welcome for the business community.

The challenge facing the sector is, ultimately, one of expectation. The next government, almost certainly led by Theresa May, will continue to challenge universities, schools and employers to take on greater responsibility for upskilling, training and adapting to provide the country’s future workforce. Concessions will only be achieved if the sector shows a willingness to work within

The [full manifesto is available here.](#)



WHAT ARE THE KEY EDUCATION MEASURES IN THE CONSERVATIVE MANIFESTO?

Higher Education

- Launch a review of funding across tertiary education as a whole, ensuring access to financial support that offers value for money, that it is available across different routes, and encourages development of the skills the UK needs.
- Make it a condition for universities hoping to charge maximum tuition fees to become involved in academy sponsorship or the founding of free schools.
- Ensure universities are “creative” about increasing opportunities for local people, especially those from working class backgrounds.
- Ensure that Britain’s “world-class” universities can attract international students.

Apprenticeships and training

- A commitment to maintain their target of 3 million apprenticeships by 2020.
- A pledge to allow large firms to pass levy funds to small firms in their supply chain.
- A new programme to allow larger firms to place apprentices in their supply chain.
- A commitment to explore teaching apprenticeships sponsored by major companies, especially in STEM subjects.
- A new national retraining scheme, including plans to allow companies to access Apprenticeship Levy funding to support wage costs of existing employees during training and a new right to request leave for training.
- Establish new institutes of technology, backed by employers, in every major city in England. These Institutes will provide courses at degree level and above, specialising in technical disciplines such as STEM. They will be eligible for public funding for productivity and skills research, and access to loans and grants for students.
- Establish funding streams under the Modern Industrial Strategy to ensure investment for the long term, and to make modern technical education available to everyone.

Schools

- £4 billion more for schools by 2022, with no school losing funding under the new formula.
- Ending universal free school lunches for children aged 5 to 7 and introducing a free school breakfast for all primary school children.
- Building at least a hundred new free schools a year.
- Lifting the ban on the establishment of selective schools, subject to conditions, such as allowing pupils to join at other ages as well as eleven.
- Improve technical education and replace the 13,000 technical qualifications with new T-levels.



HOW WA CAN HELP YOU

Assessing the impact on your organisation

An assessment of the immediate political and economic implications of the manifesto measures:

1. The latest political developments and implications for you as the new government is formed and the manifesto is implemented.
2. How to effectively position your organisation within the developing political, media and policy narrative around consumers and markets.
3. A presentation to your senior team on the government's proposals and our analysis.

Supporting your engagement strategy

A deep-dive into your public affairs, PR and communications strategy to help you maximise impact:

1. Review your strategy and stress-test your messaging in light of the manifesto announcements.
2. Make recommendations on how you revise your strategy to ensure it effectively responds.
3. Support in engaging with the new government post-election.
4. Support in responding to specific proposals post-election, and engaging throughout the legislative and regulatory process.
5. Help you to forward-plan your political engagement against key milestones.

ABOUT WA

WA is the agency of choice for clients with complex public affairs and strategic communications challenges.

WA blends creative, strategic thinking with experience to solve public affairs and strategic communications challenges. We develop and protect clients' reputation, inform the policy debate and help clients get up to speed quickly on the external issues and stakeholders that matter.

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