

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

MACRO ANALYSIS

Despite the brief interruption of a heckler, there will be sighs of relief after today's launch of Labour's manifesto. As predicted there were no surprises and many of the big policies had been briefed well in advance. What it demonstrates is quite how serious Sir Keir is about winning the election and reassuring the swing voters he needs for a healthy majority.

The five 'missions' are padded out a little but the focus is undeniably one of economic growth and reassurance that Labour can be trusted on the economy. Will everyone be happy with the manifesto? Well no, there are already grumblings on the left of the party that it's not radical enough. But as Sir Keir made abundantly clear in the Sky News debate last night – his priority is country not party, and today's manifesto is a clear reflection of this mantra.

Jennifer Gerber, Senior Political Advisor, WA and former Labour Special Advisor

POLICY ANALYSIS

While education continues to play a very low-key role in the campaign, it goes to the heart of Labour's pitch to voters.

Keir Starmer famously said that it was his "... mission to shatter the class ceiling in Britain, so that when parents tell their children: 'if you work hard, you can achieve anything' they will be able to, no matter where they've come from" and while economic constraints and political caution prevent significant funding pledges, there are a number of policies where you can see this 'mission' coming through.

As with all other sectors, there are no surprises from Labour regarding its education commitments, with all of them having been telegraphed months, and sometimes years, in advance.

If they hadn't been, then policies such as VAT on private school fees; reform of the Apprenticeship Levy; 6,500 new teachers; wholesale curriculum reform; and free breakfast clubs in all primary schools would have undoubtedly made headlines today. However, none of these are new policies, and all have been subject to debate, discussion and lobbying for some time.

The difficulty for Bridget Phillipson when she steps in through the doors of the Department for Education is that she will inherit burning platforms across the sector – expensive childcare, crumbling schools, pupil absenteeism, teacher shortages, industrial unrest, a disjointed skills system, and universities facing bankruptcy.

Even sorting out the multitude of problems with early years and schools is a mammoth task that could take 10 years, and that is before we get onto the central role that skills will need to play in a successful industrial strategy, and the importance of universities to place-based economic growth.

To discuss WA's manifesto analysis and what it means for your organisation, please email **Lee Findell**, Head of Education and Skills at leefindell@wacomms.co.uk.

HEADLINE POLICY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Key pledges on education in the Labour manifesto:

- Recruit 6,500 new expert teachers in key subjects funded by applying VAT and business rates to private schools
- 3,000 new primary school-based nurseries also funded by VAT on private schools
- Free breakfast clubs in every primary school funded from closing further non-dom tax loopholes
- An expert-led review of the school curriculum and assessment, working with school staff, parents and employers
- Bring forward a comprehensive strategy for post-16 education - guaranteeing training, an apprenticeship, or help to find work for all 18- to 21-year-olds.
- Better integrate further and higher education, and ensure high-quality teaching, through Labour's post-16 skills strategy
- Create a secure future for higher education and the opportunities it creates across the UK

- Establish Skills England to bring together business, training providers and unions with national and local government to ensure a highly trained workforce
- Create a flexible Growth and Skills Levy, with Skills England consulting on eligible courses to ensure qualifications offer value for money
- Transform Further Education colleges into specialist Technical Excellence Colleges

WA ADVISORY BOARD ANALYSIS

It is great that universities figure positively and often in Labour's plans for economic growth and industrial strategy. The commitment to 10 year funding for 'key' R&D institutions is also welcome. There's also at least a recognition that the funding model doesn't work. My predictions: reform will be the price of more funding, and students will end up paying more after they graduate.

Sir Philip Rutnam, Chair of the Advisory Board,
WA Communications

Labour's most specific pledge – to recruit 6,500 new teachers in the key subjects remains the centerpiece of Labour's education sell. With a clear focus on spreading opportunity far and wide, from additional childcare places to free breakfast clubs and high quality apprenticeships, they'll be content that they have an offer that will resonate with both parents and young people.

Jennifer Gerber, Senior Political Advisor,
WA Communications and former Labour
Special Advisor

There is a pledge to set up 'breakfast clubs' in schools. The shadow education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, fought hard for a more ambitious childcare scheme, but came up against Rachel Reeves unyielding stance on spending. Ending charitable status on private schools raises some cash, but not a huge amount. We will only learn in government what Labour proposes to do in relation to the universities funding crisis. Keir Starmer is not a fan of tuition fees even if he u- turned on his early pledge to abolish them.

Steve Richards, Senior Adviser, WA Communications