

# Our manifesto



The election, as far as education goes, has been a big, wide yawn. There isn't a serious new idea among any of the parties. (For the detail, see Sue Hackman's article on page 20). So we thought we would throw the cat amongst the very tame pigeons and create our own manifesto.

- 1) First, we would do something very radical and address the purposes of education. The two main planks of this would be: to produce workers with the skills the economy needs, rather than pluck ideological nostrums out of the 1950s and then shove them down everybody's throats; and to create individuals with the critical and creative skills to enrich their economic, cultural and social lives. This approaches education from two different directions – the country's needs and the individual's needs. They needn't be opposing ideological poles, as they are so often presented. Other policies follow from this orientation.
- 2) We've got more than enough lawyers, bankers, insurance clerks, media wannabes and estate agents. As an economy, we can only survive by generating high-end scientific, technical and creative products and services, so we need a massive turn in schools towards technical, scientific and artistic skills. We also need parity between academic and technical/vocational education. In short, we would introduce large aspects of the Tomlinson Report (sabotaged by Blair), and we would support Tech Bacc and the Technical Institutes being pushed by Labour (their only real policy).
- 3) We would recognise that less and less of the population will be occupied in low and even medium skilled jobs, as technology – and in particular, robotics – takes over. We would therefore have a major turn towards creative arts, so that small-scale, fee-earning productions and the number of national and international quality artists are increased, along with their earnings for the economy. Arts Colleges, swept aside by comprehensivisation (along with Technical Colleges), will be re-introduced.
- 4) We would also create Business Institutes that promote entrepreneurial activity as a creative and respected endeavour, ending the long-term, snooty anti-trade bias in our education system.
- 5) As part of our attempts to create a meritocratic education and social system and to equalise opportunity, we will address the whole issue of private education and the astonishing grip top public schools have on Oxbridge, the civil service and key business and media organisations. We would make all public schools pay VAT on their charges and remove their other charitable concessions. We would also pass positive discrimination legislation in favour of state school alumni for posts in the civil service, the BBC and all other public sector organisations.
- 6) As part of this push towards meritocracy, we would develop a funding principle for schools providing the same amount per pupil, no matter what status of school is attended. Additional funding would be based on educational need rather than parental income, socio-economic location and Free School Meals. We would also address the funding imbalance between primary and secondary schools.

- 7) We would re-think the nature of the National Curriculum, making all schools participate in achieving its objectives (and by all schools, we don't mean half of all schools), but giving teachers more freedom as to how to deliver them. It will be deeper rather than broader, with an approach that mirrors the best aspects of the Common Core Standards movement in the USA. Teaching will be focused on developing critical, investigative and collaborative skills, and project-based learning will be a major feature of teaching and learning in both primary and secondary schools.
- 8) Children will be encouraged to take dictionaries into exams and tests, as well as reference works accessed by electronic devices, calculators and smartphones (with the sound turned off), on the grounds that it is more important to know how to access knowledge than it is to regurgitate it parrot-like. The only examination where this would not be allowed is an exam on the role of the Luddites in history.
- 9) Student assessment will be completely re-thought, so that it tests valuable educational and social skills, collaborative working, project management, innovation, creativity, investigative skills, critical analysis, organisational ability, and so on and so forth.
- 10) We will address the quality of teaching by recognising that a one-year PGCE training course and one probationary year is inadequate training for the profession, which we would rate as more socially important than the medical profession. However, we would broadly follow the medical training model, with at least a three-year initial programme of study based in a school with university support, followed by two more years in-practice specialisation and study, to fully qualify as a professional teacher.
- 11) CPD for teachers would become compulsory, as it is for other professions, and at least one week of the six-week summer holiday would have to be spent on a CPD course.
- 12) We would raise the starting age of school to six or seven, with a more extended kindergarten experience, in common with our European counterparts. We would encourage flexible working for parents so that they can spend as much time as possible with their children, disputing the notion that full-time nursery education from an early age is a jolly good thing.
- 13) On accountability, we would make a school's chair of governors electable by the school stakeholders, and then pay them a reasonable amount to do a difficult and onerous job. School clerks to the governing bodies would also be paid more.
- 14) On local authority control of schools, we would think about this, then fudge it until such time as the funding status of local government and the quality of its politicians have been reformed. On Ofsted, we would allow it to become more pro-active in helping schools improve, and stop its threatening and offensive attitude towards schools and teachers. We would make their judgements on schools and teachers more standardised by legislating to make sure they use Imaginative Minds' brilliant app, **i-WIGT**.
- 15) Finally, if we are forced to rule with the help of a coalition, we will make sure that Tristram Hunt and the current Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, come nowhere near the DfE. We will appoint Tristram Hunt as the Minister of State for Scottish Affairs, and Nicky Morgan will be sent as Special Envoy (without portfolio) to New Zealand.

