

What do we want from the next Prime Minister?



Policy ideas for new leadership: Education

Dr Joanna Williams

Foreword by Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP



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Foreword

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

Ensuring education policy provides every child – whatever their background and wherever they live – with the best possible start in life is one of the most important responsibilities of government. Our early years settings, schools, colleges and universities hold the key to our future success: from equipping the next generation to compete in an ever more competitive jobs market, to ensuring every child receives their entitlement to the ‘best that has been thought and said’.

Reform in recent years has gone a long way to making our education system truly world class. Giving schools the freedom to run themselves has empowered headteachers, allowing them to use their expertise to serve their local communities. And our relentless focus on standards has seen English schools climb the international rankings. Importantly, this progress has been especially marked among the children from low-income families - showing that both excellence and social justice can be achieved when teachers are empowered to use evidence-based approaches.

Policy Exchange - the spiritual home of education reform - reminds us in this interesting and thoughtful paper, that we must continue to spread excellence throughout all parts of the country. Pursuing the drive to improve behaviour, embracing knowledge-rich curricula and enabling teachers to pursue their passion for their own subject, can all raise outcomes and aid teacher recruitment and retention. Importantly, it will show our valued teachers – as well as parents and pupils – that the government is on their side. The Early Career Framework – backed by a guaranteed £130 million a year – provides a firm foundation on which to pursue this agenda, providing all first and second year teachers with a structured package of support at the start of their careers. From this platform, we must work with the profession to ensure every teacher – whatever their career ambitions – is supported to develop expertise.

In higher and further education, Policy Exchange is right to urge the next government to consider carefully the Augar review. While our universities lead the world, more needs to be done to improve the opportunities for those who choose a different path. To ensure the vision of our reforms to the school system is fully realised, we must be certain that both higher and further education systems are equally rigorous.

Education in England is one of the great successes of the past 9 years. Under successive radical and reforming Secretaries of State, Conservative values have underpinned radical reforms – at times welcomed, but too often resisted – that have resulted in:

- A narrowing of the attainment gap at primary and secondary;
- More disadvantaged children going on to university than ever before;
- 163,000 more 6 year olds on track in reading this year than in 2012;
- Exceptional free schools and academies challenging what is thought to be possible;
- More children starting school with a good level of development; and
- 85% of schools rated as Good or Outstanding;

Whilst there remains much more to do, the next government will begin on the front foot. After 9 years of radical reform – during an important and necessary period of belt-tightening – the next Secretary of State will have the very best opportunity to add to a fine record of achievement in government.

Education

A policy programme to raise standards at all levels of the education sector and to ensure the UK has the skilled and qualified labour force necessary to boost national productivity.

The next government should...

1. Raise standards in schools through a commitment to improving behaviour in the classroom and prioritising the expectation and enforcement of high standards of discipline within all schools.
2. Improve teaching by cutting class sizes in the Foundation Stage; supporting a knowledge based curriculum; keeping SATs for pupils at the end of Key Stage Two; and with increased monitoring of pupil behaviour.
3. Incentivise teacher retention and recruitment, as well as improve the knowledge and skills of teachers, through the introduction of a bursary scheme to fund teachers to study for a higher degree and the introduction of in-service sabbaticals with a focus on professional development.
4. Increase funding for the Further Education sector, as recommended by the Augar Review.
5. Incentivise uptake of vocational qualifications by making T-levels compatible with A-levels and allowing for transfer between the two. Increase funding for and awareness of apprenticeships at all levels.
6. Review university admissions processes with a particular focus on the impact of unconditional and contextual offers. Reduce university tuition fees to £7,500 as recommended in the Augar Review and review the interest rate on repayments.

Standards in schools have improved significantly over the past decade as reforms instigated by Michael Gove continue to pay dividends. Now, 85% of schools are judged to be good or outstanding compared to only 68% in 2010. At Key Stage Two, 64% of pupils now reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. This represents an increase on the previous year in all subjects, despite the tests having been made more challenging. However, there is scope for schools to go further still in raising standards and ensuring that, at age 16, all children can access an appropriate academic or vocational route to allow them to fulfil their potential.

Schools continue to face problems with a break down of discipline. Most recently, staff at Starbank School in Birmingham have gone on strike

to protest against pupils carrying knives, threatening staff and other pupils and fighting in the corridors. Yet Starbank School had been graded Outstanding by Ofsted in its most recent inspection. It is absolutely vital that teachers and pupils are safe from all forms of violence and threats of violence in school. Being safe in school is a fundamental right. It is also necessary for teaching and learning to take.

The improved academic performance of school pupils has not been carried over into all aspects of the education system. For too long, the Further Education sector has been overlooked. It has been squeezed between schools on one hand and higher education on the other. Yet Further Education is vital for providing young people with the skills they need for employment and social mobility. Currently, close to 50% of all young people go on to higher education and yet this increase has occurred with little discussion as to the purpose of attending university today.

We know the changes that still need to be made. Ofsted have reviewed their inspection framework and will place a new emphasis on the quality and content of the curriculum. Policy Exchange welcomes this shift in focus onto the very substance of education. Likewise, we know that too often persistent disruptive behaviour in schools interrupts the teaching and learning of far too many pupils and drives teachers from the profession. We welcome the appointment of Tom Bennett as the national behaviour tsar, leading a £10 million project to support 500 schools across England to develop policies like detention systems and new sanctions for pupils.

However, it is important to capitalise upon these positive developments. There must be support in place to enable teachers and schools to deliver a knowledge based curriculum. Key Stage 2 SATs and GCSEs must be maintained as an important measure of pupil progress and school accountability. The Department for Education must continue to support head teachers seeking to address problems with pupil behaviour. As a nation we can no longer afford to waste the talents of young people in an under-resourced and under-funded Further Education sector.

Raising standards in schools

Policy: The next government must commit to improving behaviour in the classroom through prioritising the expectation and enforcement of high standards of discipline within all schools.

It is imperative that pupils and teachers feel safe in school. Problems associated with knife crime, gangs or drug dealing must not be permitted to spill over onto school grounds. Headteachers must be held responsible for ensuring all children are safe from threats of violence within their school.

Improving pupil behaviour is vital not just as an end in itself but for the creation of a productive environment for teaching and learning. Teachers, not violent, aggressive or bullying pupils, must be in authority in the classroom.

Policy Exchange commissioned one of the most extensive investigations ever conducted into pupil behaviour in order to determine the scale and

impact of disruption in our schools. Close to 3,000 teachers, parents and pupils were surveyed by DeltaPoll. The findings are summarised in the box below.

Persistent disruption is damaging children’s learning by preventing effective teaching from taking place and by driving teachers out of the classroom.

- 75% of teachers say they commonly experience disruption in their own school.
- 54% of teachers think the quality of children’s education is affected by disrupted lessons.
- 62% of teachers are currently, or have previously, considered leaving the profession because of poor pupil behaviour.
- 71% of the teachers we polled agreed that potential teachers are being put off joining the profession by the fear of becoming victim to poor behaviour from pupils.
- 45% of teachers polled claim their initial teacher training did not prepare them to manage pupil behaviour.
- Persistent disruptive behaviour is the most common reason for permanent exclusions in state funded primary, secondary and special schools - accounting for 2,755 (35.7%) of all permanent exclusions in 2016/17.

(From: “It Just Grinds You Down” Persistent disruptive behaviour in schools and what can be done about it, *Policy Exchange*, December 2018.)

Our research was welcomed by Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, Education Secretary, who said: “This is a very significant report from Policy Exchange with important findings. Poor behaviour disrupts learning and teaching and blights the life chances of too many children in this country. Often, poor behaviour has the most detrimental impact upon the least advantaged pupils.”

Policy: The next government should improve teaching in schools by cutting class sizes in the Foundation Stage, supporting a knowledge based curriculum, keeping SATs for pupils at the end of Key Stage Two and with increased monitoring of pupil behaviour.

Current policy is for class sizes throughout Primary School to be restricted to thirty pupils. This should be halved for the very youngest children in the Foundation Stage (age 3-5) so they will never be taught in a group larger than 15. This will allow children to be better prepared for Key Stage One.

Ofsted have announced that their new inspection framework will focus ‘on the real substance of education: the curriculum.’ The Department for Education should support this approach by facilitating the sharing of best practice between schools and the appointment of regional subject leads.

The Labour Party has announced plans to abolish SATs for pupils at the end of Key Stage 2. It is important to keep SATs as a measure of school

accountability and a means of maintaining academic standards. New Department for Education guidelines should be sent to schools detailing best practice for the administration of SATs with a particular emphasis on ensuring children are not placed under unnecessary pressure.

Policy: The next government should incentivise teacher retention and recruitment, as well as improve the knowledge and skills of teachers, through the introduction of a bursary scheme to fund teachers to study for a higher degree and the introduction of in-service sabbaticals with a focus on professional development.

Great educationalists such as Matthew Arnold and Michael Oakeshott thought of education as a conversation between the generations, an opportunity for adults to pass on to children their intellectual birthright. Significantly, this meant discerning the best that had been thought and said.

Knowledge is a key part of providing an excellent education – it empowers learners and its must be at the core of state education to give children the best chance of an enriched and prosperous adulthood.

In recent years, bold steps forward have been taken to support and strengthen the place of knowledge in the curriculum and throughout England's schools. The Department for Education is supporting the development of coherent curriculum programmes – as proposed by Policy Exchange – that offer pupils a robust, rich education in a structured way throughout their schooling, ensuring facts are placed in context and are aquired with a sense of purpose. It is vital, therefore, that the next government continues this drive, seeking trusted independent institutions like the British Museum and Science Museum to developed authoritative, relevant, well-structured programmes of study.

Of equal importance is the continuing development of the teaching workforce. In order to attract and retain the very best, it is essential that teachers are given the time and space to reconnect with the subjects about which they are passionate, refresh their training and be given the opportunity to aquire new skills. Such development empowers the teaching of a knowledge-rich curriculum and promises a fulfilling career to a profession facing retention challenges.

The importance of a knowledge-based curriculum

Professor E.D. Hirsch

A speech community begins to exist in a classroom when all of its members – teacher and students – share enough shared unspoken background knowledge to enable a fully successful communication to occur. Progress in learning for a whole class or even for a single tutee depends on the teacher and the learner sharing not just the basic meaning of the explicit words but also meanings that are not explicit. Only by building up the shared background knowledge that is going to be needed in later classes can all children in the class progress in knowledge and language.

To be successful, then, a classroom must form a progressively-knowledgeable speech community that effectively exploits both the explicit sense of words and the inexplicit background knowledge that enables the words to communicate effectively. It's pretty obvious that this can be done only through a carefully planned-out sequence of topics. An education that is to reach all students has to be based upon shared relevant background knowledge that has formed the classrooms into speech communities. Such shared background knowledge for all is only built up over time when month by month and year by year our young students learn many of the same things. Shared relevant knowledge is the key to all effective education, especially elementary education. It's not a new principle. To create this common platform for all children is called "scaffolding" in the educational literature. It's obvious to common sense. What is less obvious is the need for commonality and scaffolding in the unspoken domain – the relevant background knowledge that enables classroom communication to occur.

Extracted from a speech delivered by Professor Hirsch, author of Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing Our Children from Failed Educational Theories at Policy Exchange in November 2018.

It is important that teachers be encouraged to maintain their own subject knowledge in order to inspire pupils and best teach a knowledge based curriculum. Building on the Career Framework published by the DfE in January 2019 – the new government should explore a bursary scheme to fund study for a higher degree, available to those who have completed a minimum of three years in the classroom. This would boost teacher subject knowledge and would additionally motivate teacher retention.

In addition to driving up the quality of teaching received by pupils, teacher retention and recruitment challenges can also be addressed. Enabling teachers to take a sabbatical to focus on their professional development, perhaps to spend time engaged in research, or studying for a professional qualification, or undertaking a placement in another part of the education sector, could offer one solution. Sabbaticals could be awarded at one month per full year of service, to be taken after a minimum of five years.

Enhancing the quality of further education and increasing the take up of apprenticeships

Policy: The next government should increase funding for the Further Education sector, as recommended by the Augar Review.

For years, Further Education has been labelled the ‘Cinderella Sector’ - neither school nor university, it is the place for ‘other people’s children’. Currently, the budget for Further Education is not protected. This means that, unlike schools, funding for Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges has been subject to successive cuts. This cannot be sustained. Low levels of funding are already having an impact on staff student ratios, the provision of extra curricular activities and the number of ranges of courses on offer. To make a success of T-levels, it is imperative that funding for Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges be brought in line with current rates of funding for schools.

Policy: The next government should incentivise uptake of vocational qualifications by making T-levels compatible with A-levels and allowing for transfer between the two. Increase funding for and awareness of apprenticeships at all levels.

The labour market of the future is unlikely to be one in which people stick with the same job for life. Instead people move within and between different employment sectors. It is important that this flexibility is reflected in the qualifications on offer to young people. In particular, T-levels should be made compatible with A-levels, so that students can readily combine the study of academic and vocational subjects and to provide a degree of brand recognition for T-levels.

A Policy Exchange investigation into T-levels and the wider vocational system found that T-levels have the potential to make a valuable contribution to our education system, but this will only be realised if they are conceived, designed and delivered in the wider context of building a high-quality and sustainable technical education route.

Getting vocational qualifications right

Rt Hon Ruth Kelly, former Secretary of State for Education and Skills

When I was Education Secretary, the Labour Government introduced Diplomas, which succeeded GNVQs as an attempt to end the split between academic and technical qualifications. Ultimately, as this research paper documents, two key lessons were learnt at the time. Any new qualification needs significant time to gain currency among employers, schools, parents and students. The plug was arguably pulled too soon. It also needs to be straightforward. A flaw in Diplomas was that they did not make the system any more transparent or easier to understand, with too many versions of each subject made available.

The challenge now, particularly as we leave the European Union and are less likely to be able to rely on skilled workers from abroad, is to make sure that the skills agenda is properly valued here in the UK. Apprenticeships are beginning to become established but there are clearly teething problems, including with the apprenticeship levy. It is also not yet fully clear how T-levels will work alongside apprenticeships. Policy Exchange's research highlights some very useful lessons from previous attempts to bridge the divide between academic and technical education. Policymakers would do well to reflect on the issues raised here and ensure that they are addressed so that we can rise to this challenge successfully. It will affect not just those who gain qualifications but all of us who will benefit from a more productive economy.

Extracted from the Foreword to A Qualified Success: An investigation into T-levels and the wider vocational system, Policy Exchange, February 2019.

A wide-ranging publicity campaign targeting both young people - and, crucially, their parents - is needed to raise awareness of the possibilities apprenticeships provide. Post-Brexit, it will be more important than ever for employers to be able to recruit from an adequately-skilled workforce. Apprenticeships have an important role to play in ensuring young people have the sector-specific skills ready for employment. They are vital for national productivity and individual social mobility. Increased funding should be made available to support and incentivise young people taking apprenticeships, particularly in sectors suffering from skills shortages. Likewise funding could support and incentivise more SMEs to take on apprentices.

Maintain the quality of our world-leading higher education sector

Policy: The next government should review university admissions processes with a particular focus on the impact of unconditional and contextual offers. Reduce university tuition fees to £7,500 as recommended in the Augur Review and review the interest rate on repayments.

Research undertaken by Policy Exchange shows that university admissions processes, the type of offers institutions make to students, when such offers are made and which students are selected, have an impact upon what happens not just in the sixth form but in the rest of the school too. This may simply be a matter of staff time dedicated to writing references and

overseeing the submission of completed UCAS forms. Teachers, pupils and perhaps even parents may become involved in discussions about predicted grades and future directions. There is evidence to suggest that pupils offered unconditional university places or lower than expected conditional offers are less committed to their A-level studies and may underperform in their final exams. When large numbers of pupils are made such offers, this can have an impact upon the culture of the school or college as a whole.

Interrogating the processes by which potential students are admitted to university allows us to examine the assumptions that currently determine what proportion of young people go on to higher education and on what basis they are selected. Changing admissions processes represent decisions universities have taken about how many students to admit and who is considered suitable for higher education. This is driven, in part, by the impact of marketisation: universities seek sufficient customers to secure long-term financial viability. However, it is also driven by a broader perception of what higher education is for.

Maintaining the confidence of students, parents and employers

The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP

Higher education is one of our most important national assets. In an increasingly uncertain future, it is important to consider how our universities can continue to thrive as world-leading institutions. I have recently warned against increasing tuition fees for students from the EU who wish to study in the UK. Students and academics from the EU make a vital contribution to British universities and this must be allowed to continue.

As Britain faces the possibility of leaving the EU, we must go further in ensuring our universities maintain the confidence of students, parents and employers. Universities must not themselves inadvertently undermine the reputation of the UK's higher education sector. This report details how this might already be happening and puts forward helpful solutions. There is a very valid concern about the practice of institutions making students unconditional offers. Indeed, there is no doubt in my mind that unconditional offers can have a disastrous impact on individual students and even entire cohorts of pupils in their final year of school or college. Sadly, this report reveals what so many of us fear. It is time for those universities engaging in this practice to change their approach and work with schools.

Extracted from the foreword to Sins of Admission, Policy Exchange, June 2019

Tuition fee debt is perceived as politically unpopular but it is a misunderstood funding mechanism. Loans have not prevented widening participation to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the repayment system is progressive. Scrapping tuition fees would be a subsidy to the most advantaged 50% of the population. As the Augur Review calls for, however, a reduction to £7,500 would bring fees more into line with the actual cost of most degrees and send an important signal. Interest on loan repayments should also be reviewed to ensure public understanding and confidence in a system that can sometimes labour under the weight of misinformation.



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