



Dods Monitoring: Party Conferences Overview

October 2019: Policy Insight

Education and Skills



Insight from conference

The consolidation of the skills brief within Gavin Williamson's portfolio appeared to bear fruit at Conservative Party conference, with the Education Secretary pledging that Britain would, "overtake Germany in opportunities to those studying technical routes by 2029". This ambition was accompanied with a raft of announcements allied with the Government's agenda of aligning qualifications employer needs. The Level 4&5 review proposes that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will assure qualifications on occupational standards. With the Government response expected next Spring, it will be interesting to see how the new Skills and Productivity Board will advise this process, and further underpin the roll out of T-level qualifications over the next four years. Williamson also announced funding for eight Institutes for Technology, which will be instrumental to delivering technical education. This will bring the total number to 20, aiming to cover every region in England. The announcement of 11 new 16-19 Maths schools further suggests a desire to double down the roll out of new institutions introduced under former secretary Damian Hinds.

Labour unsurprisingly located the principle of universality at the heart of their educational offer, pledging to deliver free nursery education for all two to four-year olds, and integrate private schools within the state system. This reinforces the party's ambition for a National Education Service, free at the point of access. This will be further informed by the Lifelong Learning Commission, coordinated by Gordon Marsden. In one fringe event, the Shadow Skills Minister intimated that the commission's final report would be released in a matter of weeks, containing proposals for the next 10-15 years. Plans to abolish Ofsted were welcomed by large sections of the nations beleaguered teaching profession. Nevertheless, more detail is required on the proposed two-phase replacement led by HMIs and the opportunities for school-led peer review. Radical proposals were also introduced for Higher Education, with Labour promising to uphold a proportional university admissions system, and establish a comprehensive co-operative university, delivering academic and vocational teaching on an equal footing. "Common ownership of the production, distribution, and exchange of knowledge itself".

The Lib Dems Personal Education and Skills Account proposals were amongst the most eye-catching outlined in Bournemouth, promising to tackle the skills gap and respond to future needs for retraining and upskilling. Other announcements coalesced around improving educational opportunities for young carers, whilst a gamut of measures on youth justice promise significant implications for schools. Perhaps most significantly, the Lib Dems promised to replace Young Offender Institutions with Secure Schools and Secure Children's Homes, "locating education at the heart of the youth justice system".

New announcements

Labour

- Integrate private schools into the state system, scrapping tax breaks and requisitioning assets
- Upgrade social mobility to social justice, turning the Social Mobility Commission into the Social Justice Commission (tasked with integration of private schools)
- Proportional university admissions system (7% of students from private schools)
- Abolish and replace Ofsted with a two-phase inspection system led by HMIs
- Introduce a statutory school's definition to crack down on estimated 500 illegal schools falling outside current inspection regime
- Roll out a nationwide school-led peer review improvement programme to support those with challenging intakes
- Free nursery education for all two- to four-year-olds.
- Introduce a Fair Food Act to end hunger in the UK
- Introduce a price cap on school uniforms and equipment
- Establish a comprehensive co-operative university. "Academic and vocational teaching on an equal footing. Common ownership of the production, distribution, and exchange of knowledge itself."
- £3 billion of equity finance available to the automotive sector to invest in electrification, and exempt new investment in plant and machinery from business rates.
- £500 million R&D investment for new automotive technologies
- £500 million of ringfenced funding for a sure start plus scheme

Conservatives

- "Super-Charge" further education, with aim to overtake Germany on technical education routes by 2029
- Establish a Skills and Productivity Board to provide strategic advice on the skills and qualifications the UK needs
- New Youth Investment Fund building up to 60 new youth centres, 100 new mobile facilities and upgrade a further 360 existing hubs.
- Extend £8.21 minimum wage to 21-24-year olds
- Further eight specialist maths free schools, to boost "elite maths teaching" for 16-19-year-olds across England
- £120m to be invested in 'Institutes of Technology' planned across 20 cities in England

New announcements

Lib Dem

- Personal Education and Skills Account, with the Government depositing at least 3 payments of £3,000 from the age of 25.
- Exam re-takes at all levels of education for young carers
- Extend carer's allowance to those undertaking more than 21 hours of education a week.
- Raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 and diverting more children away from the criminal justice system
- Ending mandatory sentences for possession of knives and corrosive substances
- Replace Young Offender Institutions with Secure Schools and Secure Children's Homes, locating education at the heart of the youth justice system
- Roll out free sanitary products to schools, colleges and universities
- Bring 16-19 per pupil funding in line with secondary school levels
- Introduce 'Young People's Premium' extending pupil premium policy to college students
- Refunding VAT colleges pay
- Giving councils power to ban new fast food outlets or such adverts within 500 metres of a school

Speeches

Labour

- Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Opposition: <http://bit.ly/2lpD6iu>
- Angela Rayner, Shadow Secretary of State for Education: <http://bit.ly/31T2m8t>
- Rebecca Long-Bailey, Shadow Secretary of State for Business and Industrial Strategy: <http://bit.ly/2VmzLuk>
- John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor: <http://bit.ly/35gv3OP>

Conservatives

- Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education: <http://bit.ly/2VI5985>
- Sajid Javid, Chancellor of the Exchequer: <http://bit.ly/33eEzQV>
- Andrea Leadon, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: <http://bit.ly/338QS0R>

Lib Dem

- Jo Swinson, Leader of the Party: <http://bit.ly/2pVVnhc>
- Layla Moran, Spokesperson on Education: <http://bit.ly/2MrsxN1>

Stakeholder reactions

Conservatives

Responding to the Education Secretary's speech at Conservative Party Conference, CBI Chief UK Policy Director, said:

"Investment in education and skills is the foundation stone of a prosperous economy and the most important factor in closing regional divides. The CBI has been calling for investment and reform of our skills system to put centre stage. The Education Secretary is right to make colleges and further education a top priority. Today's announcement, coming hot on the heels of further funding announced in the Spending Review, shows the Government is rising to the challenge."

On the £120 million additional investment for up to eight new Institutes of Technology, Matthew said:

"Expanding high-quality technical education and training is a top priority for employers who will welcome this extra investment. By bringing firms, colleges and higher education together, these Institutes can open the door to great careers or further training."

On the introduction of specialist 16-19 maths schools in every region, Matthew said: *"More than four in five businesses rank developing STEM skills amongst their top three priorities for action, so a specialist maths schools in every region will help to plug this gap."*

Responding to Gavin Williamson's speech, Paul Whiteman, general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT, said: *I am pleased that the government eventually accepted that new money for education is needed. A year ago they were denying that the funding crisis was real. They have delivered a significant amount. But when you analyse the figures behind the headline promise, as the IFS has done for example, there will still be no real terms funding growth in per pupil funding from 2009/10 to 2022/23. That's a funding freeze that's lasted for thirteen years. Schools won't receive a penny until next year. In the meantime, their budgets are still at breaking point and they are struggling to make ends meet. There are also some obvious gaps in what's been promised. Early years, SEND and sixth form education are all areas of concern for us. The government now has ambitious plans for Further Education. The £120m mentioned today is a re-announcement of money pledged in the Spending Review. We have campaigned alongside other organisations for the 16-19 funding rate to be raised to £4,760 per student. It will be difficult to achieve what has been promised when the funding announced lags so significantly behind what's needed.*

Cat Smith MP, Shadow Minister for Youth Affairs, responding to the Chancellor's announcement of funding of youth services, said:

"It's about time the government started to invest in our young people, however the Chancellor's announcement falls far short from the funding needed to rebuild our decimated youth service. We cannot trust this government is serious about ending austerity and championing young people's needs. Instead of quick fixes, Labour will match the ambition of our young people by giving them the support they need, so that every young person can access high quality youth work in their community."

Stakeholder reactions

Responding to Gavin Williamson's announcement that the Government will set a target to "overtake Germany in the opportunities we offer to those studying technical routes by 2029", Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary Layla Moran MP said:

"Gavin Williamson's new target is big on ambition for technical education, but scant on the detail of how we get there. The Conservatives have left our colleges underfunded and unloved. The money announced in the Spending Round was over £1 billion short of what is needed to get per-student funding back up to 2010 levels in real terms. Meanwhile, students are being taught fewer subjects for fewer hours and class sizes are going up. Liberal Democrats will invest in every young person, no matter how and where they study. Our colleges should have the same funding levels, support and status as our secondary schools."

Responding to Gavin Williamson's Speech, Chief Executive of the AoC, David Hughes said:

"It is very encouraging to see the Secretary of State today back up his strong support for colleges with more investment. His speech reinforces the Prime Minister and Chancellor's commitment to technical and vocational education. The second funding announcement in as many months shows the tide, rightly, is changing. He is right to highlight that those not going to university should be afforded equal opportunities to succeed. This investment, alongside the £400m announced earlier this month are a great start to achieving that. More will be needed though to make this a reality. I share the Secretary of State's desire to have a post-16 education system fit for the future that is coherent, joined up and providing the opportunities and choices for those that have been neglected for far too long. In fact, that desire seems now to be shared across the political spectrum, as it should be. Education, skills and opportunities should be above politics. Colleges have the knowledge, teaching staff and initiative to deliver the 'revolution in technical education' Mr Williamson described so passionately. Prioritising them on the political, economic and social agenda will benefit not only young people and adults, but communities, businesses and economic prosperity all over the country."

Commenting on the Education Secretary's speech at Conservative Party Conference, Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, said:

"In his speech to Conservative Party Conference, Gavin Williamson lauded the achievements of nursery schools. He is right, but what these schools need is an announcement about their future funding. There are 392 nursery schools that receive a third of their income through the Maintained Nursery School Grant. The grant runs out in August 2020, and without the grant these schools will be forced to close. Parents, teachers and head teachers have been campaigning to save these schools which make such a contribution to social mobility. They are the highest rated schools in the country with 98% of them judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. Gavin Williamson must get the Treasury to find the money to save the maintained nursery sector. Parents and teachers need the reassurance that these schools will be able to stay open next year. The ambition for Britain to offer better technical education than Germany in ten years' time will come to nothing if more funding is not found. Colleges and school sixth forms have suffered the worst cuts of any part of the education system over the last nine years. Even after the announcement of an additional £400m in April 2020, they still have £1.1bn less in real terms than in 2010. So, yet again announcements on education which are not backed up with the necessary funding to see their implementation or continued existence. Very disappointing."

Stakeholder reactions

Labour

Commenting on the announcement by Angela Rayner on the Labour Party 's plans for the future of inspection, Ms Chris Keates, General Secretary (Acting) of NASUWT said:

The Labour Party has rightly recognised the critical role played by an independent national education inspectorate in a fit for purpose accountability framework. Such a body, led by trained and experienced Her Majesty's Inspectors, is essential in ensuring public confidence in the education system. Independent inspection provides a more rounded picture of the contribution made by schools, colleges and other educational settings to the progress and achievement of children and young people than accountability systems based on learner performance data alone. The Labour Party is, therefore, to be congratulated for rejecting ill-considered calls for the discontinuation of a national inspection system and for its commitment to ensuring that no school will be able to operate outside this system.

Responding to the Labour Party announcement that they will campaign to abolish Ofsted, Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary Layla Moran MP said:

It is always good to see the Labour Party copying another key Lib Dem education promise, just as they followed us in calling for SATs to be scrapped, here they are trailing in behind again. The Conservatives ' high stakes testing regime is hurting our children. SATs and Ofsted inspections are causing stress and anxiety for pupils and teachers, even though they mean nothing for a child's life chances. Ofsted lost the trust of the teaching profession long ago. We need an inspection system that parents, and teachers can trust, supporting schools to succeed rather than punishing them for failure. But Angela Rayner must go further. We must end teaching to the test – which is why Liberal Democrats want to scrap league tables in their current form. Parents should be able to see the full picture of how their school is doing, not just how well Year 6 pupils do in a week of English and Maths tests.

Commenting on Labour's plan, if elected, to abolish Ofsted, Dr Mary Bousted, joint general secretary of the National Education Union, said:

"The NEU welcomes Labour's announcement that it will abolish Ofsted. Ofsted has been a force for lowering school standards by driving teachers from the profession. Tens of thousands of hard working, competent and professional school leaders and teachers have given up the profession, defeated and worn down by excessive workload and stress caused by trying to second guess what the latest Ofsted 'fad' is. "Labours proposals clear the way for a strong, locally driven movement to improve educational standards. London Challenge showed just what can be achieved when schools work in collaboration, rather than competition, with each other. The recreation of a local advisory service which will broker school to school support is a great step forward. Schools will no longer be 'orphaned', abandoned and set adrift without the expert advice and guidance needed to make real improvements in the quality of education they provide. This announcement demonstrates Labour's serious intent to break the mould of education policy which has been driving the teaching profession into a brick wall. We look forward to working with Labour to further develop these proposals and look forward to their implementation."

Stakeholder reactions

Responding to Angela Rayner's speech, Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, said:

"Yet again Labour are putting ideology before the education of our children. Parents' will be rightly fearful of Corbyn's plans to abolish independent inspections, scrap SATs and destroy academies and free schools. Labour would weaken discipline, lower standards and reduce choice and information for parents. Conservatives have driven up school standards and will continue to do so – we're increasing funding for every school, continuing to improve discipline in classrooms and ensuring that every child gets the world class education they deserve."

Responding to Labour's plans, the Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb said:

This is yet another sign of the extreme left-wing ideological drift that Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party has taken. Labour are clearly intent on reversing the huge improvements that have been seen, particularly for the most disadvantaged children, by ending academies and free schools. Now they want to stop parents having even the most basic information so that they can make informed choices about their children's schools.

Responding to the announcement that Labour would replace Ofsted with a 'two-phase' inspection system, under which schools and childcare providers would be subjected to regular 'health checks' led by local authorities, Chief Executive of the National Day Nurseries Association, said:

Parents want to be assured about the quality of care and early education so any proposed changes and new structures must have a clear way of doing this. The safety of children must be paramount. There also needs to be a way of recognising that settings follow national standards and deliver the EYFS curriculum. We need to see more details about what is being proposed to replace the current inspection and regulatory system in England to ensure it meets the needs of children, families and providers. We would have concerns about this being done at a local level as it could potentially create a postcode lottery of standards.

Responding to Labour's plans to introduce free childcare for all two-to-four-year-olds, Chief Executive of the Early Years Alliance, Neil Leitch said:

Proposals to create more funded hours and reinvest in Sure Start would mean more children have access to a quality early education. It's an offer that could transform the lives of some of our most disadvantaged children and should be welcomed by anyone interested in social mobility. That said, even without seeing the detail we can be confident these proposals represent an unprecedented financial commitment to early education spending. And that will concern childcare providers, especially when thousands have closed in recent years, many as a direct result of governments overpromising "free" childcare in elections and underfunding in delivery.

Stakeholder reactions

Lib Dem

Commenting on Jo Swinson's speech and the Lib Dem's pledges on education funding, Mark Littlewood, Director General at the Institute of Economic Affairs said:

"Like its fellow parties, the Liberal Democrats seem to think more public spending is the answer to the nation's woes, having pledged a £1billion investment package for colleges and education, seemingly without giving consideration to how it will be costed or the UK's budget deficit, which has yet to be fully eradicated. Despite supposedly championing liberalism, the party seems wedded to state intervention into people's personal lives, signalled by party members' passing motions which included a commitment to introduce minimum alcohol pricing in England, and giving councils power to ban new fast food outlets or such adverts within 500 metres of a school".

Policy discussions from the fringe

Labour

The Northern Powerhouse: Tackling the education and skills gap to close the North-South divide

Thelma Walker, Member of the Education Select Committee, alluded to the investigation of education in the north, praised the work of the Children's Commissioner as an advocate for young people, and insisted that it was incumbent on businesses to lead on apprenticeship engagement, to ensure that pupils learn about the range of options available. <http://bit.ly/2lccRUD>

Industrial Strategy: Can we build an 'economy that works for everyone'?

Panellists discussed how to ensure significant transformations in the economy worked for individuals and communities throughout the nation. <http://bit.ly/2l62Acm>

The Employment and Skills Debate: Creating Prosperity, Growth and Opportunity for All

The Shadow Skills Minister, Gordon Marsden agreed that it was appropriate to discuss and recognise regional disparities, but it was also essential to appreciate the complexities and inequalities within regions. He intimated his lukewarm feelings towards LEPs and stated that they had checkered results. He also said that skills devolution was the smart thing to do economically but can also in driving cohesion in communities and would represent a key area of Labour's Lifelong Learning Commission. He expressed hope that the report would be published over the coming weeks and would contain proposals for the next 10-15 years. <http://bit.ly/2kycZxc>

Policy discussions from the fringe

Further Education and the Fair Economy

Gordon Marsden MP criticised the lack of funding for Further Education over the last decade. He spoke about the pride and self-confidence that could come from vocational skills and claimed

that the value of these could not be overstated. He was enthusiastic about the importance of face-to-face interaction and collaboration with peers that FE offered, saying that it offered unparalleled life skills. He also referenced the House of Lords Committee on seaside towns, noting the challenges that people in those areas had in accessing higher education and said that the educational challenges in those areas was “palpable”. <http://bit.ly/2IkUX1L>

Valuing Teachers

Mike Kane, shadow schools minister, said that the Labour Party would bring an end to “toxic testing” and ensure that teachers had proper qualifications in a bid to bring “hope” back to the profession. He stated “far too many teachers in our system are absolutely unqualified. It isn’t a profession, it is becoming more of a trade which you learn on the job”. Speaking after the pledge to scrap Ofsted, Kane said that forcing teachers to “teach to the test” had resulted in plummeting morale. He said that Ofsted was not fit for purpose. <http://bit.ly/2m5otsu>

Choosing Childhood: How a Labour Government should prioritise children

Shadow Early Years Minister, Tracy Brabin emphasised the Labour Party’s determination and commitment to children, alluding to the promised £500 million of ringfenced funding for a sure start plus scheme. Brabin also asserted that services needed to be driven by communities. <http://bit.ly/2myFvPU>

Enabling Children with Special Educational Needs to Achieve Their Full Potential

The panel explored the impact of cuts to funding for SEND and discussed potential alternative models of support. They emphasised the importance of young people being respected and empowered to reach their full potential. <https://bit.ly/2msfRMF>

Conservatives

Implementing Augar - building an adult education system fit for the future of work

A panel debate on the importance of and barriers to lifelong learning. Panellists spoke about the need to take small businesses into account when talking about upskilling and plugging the skills gap; they also touched on the fall in funding towards higher education, concerns about funding for apprenticeships for small businesses and the need for increase awareness regarding alternatives to university. David Hughes, CEO, Association of Colleges, praised the Augar report and said it contained excellent analysis on colleges and raised dismay that parts of it had been dismissed by the former Universities minister. He said there needed to be greater awareness around alternatives to university. <http://bit.ly/2nuQGKk>

Policy discussions from the fringe

Lib Dem

Toxic testing – why fundamental reforms are needed now

Layla Moran spoke of her experience as a teacher and her dismay when being pressured to redirect efforts away from struggling pupils under Michael Gove's reforms. She said that the Lib Dems would introduce a child centred curriculum, that would phase out 11+ exams. She also expressed a desire to see a "massive upskilling of teachers" which would help the profession to provide children with the tools to "ask good questions", not just answer tests. <http://bit.ly/2lVVUxq>

The Future of Education Funding

Panellists discussed the Government's recent school funding announcements and the difference they could make to schools nationwide. Panellists from the NEU commented on the long-term squeezes for school budgets and their expectation that disadvantaged schools would continue to suffer during the "levelling up" process. <http://bit.ly/2mbeL7Q>

The jobs that don't exist yet- The future of talent

Lib Dem London Mayoral Candidate, Siobhan Benita maintained that soft skills and people skills would still be essential as AI developed. She said that bringing businesses together, with Government and the education sector would be essential to determining how to develop the future workforce. <http://bit.ly/2kMht3r>







Essential information and connections

London 11th Floor | The Shard | 32 London Bridge Street | London SE1 9SG

Brussels 7th Floor | Rue du Trône 60 | Brussels 1050 | Belgium

Edinburgh 32 Calton Road | Edinburgh | EH8 8DP

Paris 315 Bureaux de la Colline | 92213 Saint-Cloud cedex | Paris

 +44 20 7593 5500  +44 20 7593 5501  customer.service@dodsgroup.com  www.dodsgroup.com

Registered in England number: 04267888 © Dods Group plc 2017