

Using this pack...

Inside this pack you will find:

- A letter from the General Secretary setting the context in which the pack is issued and describing its purpose.
- Ideas for actions individual NASUWT members can take to raise issues during the campaign.
- Ideas for actions local officers and Associations can take to raise issues during the campaign.
- 'Getting the Message Across'.
- Sample questions to raise with candidates.
- A list of sources of further information.
- A set of NASUWT policy summaries which include views expressed by the main parties on important election issues.

Things you can do today

- Make sure that all of your colleagues are aware of this pack and that they can obtain copies by:
- phone – 0121 453 6150;
- e-mail – communications@mail.nasuwt.org.uk; or
- NASUWT website – www.teachersunion.org.uk.
- Copy and distribute the information in this pack to friends, family and work colleagues.

NASUWT

Hillscourt Education Centre,

Rose Hill, Rednal,

Birmingham B45 8RS.

Tel: 0121 453 6150

Fax: 0121 457 6208/9

E-mail: nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk

Website: www.teachersunion.org.uk

Dear Colleague

The General Election on 5 May is of vital importance to all teachers. Although devolved Governments have assumed responsibility for many aspects of education, the agenda and policy direction is still set in Westminster and decisions made there by MPs and Ministers impact on teachers in all parts of the UK.

NASUWT is not affiliated to any political party. As the largest union representing teachers and headteachers throughout the UK, whose priority is to serve the best interests of its members, NASUWT believes it has a responsibility to ensure that members are aware of the views of the main parties on key issues which affect their daily working lives to enable them to make an informed choice when casting their vote.

In addition, the election also provides the opportunity for the Union to raise awareness of and promote its policies to the main parties and to the public, ensuring that education remains high on the political agenda.

It is for these reasons that NASUWT has produced this election briefing pack. It is of course not possible to address every issue of concern raised by teachers in the information provided but we have selected the ones most frequently raised with us by members.

For each of the topics on which we have provided a briefing there is information directly from the main parties. Reading the information on one of the topics in the briefing sheets may identify that, on that issue, one party appears to have a more attractive stance than another and it is therefore advisable to ensure that the policies of all the parties are viewed in the round, as a total package.

We are all committed to ensuring that young people receive their entitlement to high-quality education. Teachers are fundamental to achieving that ambition. Please ensure that your needs and aspirations are a key election issue by using the information NASUWT has provided to help you to engage in the process and above all by using your vote on 5 May 2005.

All best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Chris Keates

General Secretary

NASUWT Members

What you can do during the General Election

Decisions made in Westminster by MPs and Ministers have a profound effect on the working lives of teachers throughout the UK.

NASUWT believes that the voice of teachers should be heard by all the main political parties during the course of the election campaign.

It is also important that before casting their vote, teachers are clear about the policies of the main parties with regard to education and particularly those issues which impact directly on them as teachers.

Even if you don't consider yourself particularly interested in politics, you will be provided during the campaign with a number of opportunities to gain more information, highlight issues of concern to teachers and promote NASUWT policy on key issues. Some ways in which you can do this are identified below.

One-to-one informal conversations

Using the information in the NASUWT election briefing pack, one-to-one conversations are the most effective way to make sure that issues of concern to teachers are at the front of your colleagues' minds as they consider how they might vote.

Attending meetings at which local candidates are present

Public meetings to which local candidates are invited are often arranged by local community groups, trade unions, including NASUWT and others. A considered question, particularly to a high-profile candidate standing in the constituency, can be extremely useful, not only in identifying their position on an issue but also in raising the awareness of the issue with other members of the public who are present.

Engaging with candidates and party workers during canvassing

The main parties engage in doorstep and telephone canvassing. This presents an opportunity for you to raise issues with them and elicit their views. Such discussions can assist in getting past the sound bites and headlines to find out what they really think and are proposing.

Using your vote

However, the most important activity in which you can engage in this election is ensuring that you use your vote on 5 May 2005.

NASUWT Local Associations and Officers

What you can do during the General Election

Raising issues of concern to NASUWT and its members during the election campaign is very important.

Using this NASUWT election briefing pack to talk to as many members as possible on a one-to-one basis and to raise their awareness of the importance of considering the stance of the main parties on matters which affect their everyday lives as teachers is vital in helping them to make informed choices about the way they vote but it is also an effective way of encouraging them to use their vote on 5 May.

NASUWT local officers and Associations, with their networks of connections and access to teachers, are in an excellent position to make sure that as many members as possible are aware of the NASUWT position on the issues which affect them. Timescales are of course very tight and it is crucial that you identify the actions you can take and implement them as quickly as possible. Listed below are some of the things you could do.

Promote the use of the NASUWT election briefing pack

Contact NASUWT Representatives and when you speak to individual members encourage them to use the pack. Take the pack with you on any school visits you have scheduled.

Supplement the national information within the pack which has been sent to members with your own local information.

Speak to as many people as possible

Talk to family, friends, members, and teachers in general about the information in this election pack and encourage them to raise these issues, suggesting the ways they can do this by referring to the information sheet about what members can do.

Contact local candidates

Contact local candidates by phone or in writing about NASUWT policies and seek their responses. If you receive written responses you can quote these in local newsletters to members.

Draw members' attention to statements made by local candidates on issues affecting teachers

This could be combined with circulating to schools the NASUWT policy briefings contained in this election pack.

Arrange local meetings with candidates to provide an opportunity for members to question them

Your National Executive Member and Regional Organiser can give advice and support on these events.

Getting the Message Across

Speaking with family, friends and colleagues

Many of the people we know and see on a regular basis might be disinclined to vote or might not be aware of the important educational issues at stake in this election. Taking some time to speak with them and to discuss the issues covered in the policy summaries included in this briefing could make all the difference to what they decide to do on 5 May.

Speaking with door-to-door campaigners or telephone canvassers

When local candidates or party workers knock on your door looking for your vote, make sure that you take the opportunity to press them on the issues in this election briefing. Let them know the issues of greatest interest to teachers and explain to them what needs to be done to tackle them. Find out their views and use what you find out to inform your discussions with family, friends and colleagues. The policy briefings in this pack will be helpful in this respect.

Telephoning and writing to candidates

Local candidates give serious consideration to telephone calls made to their offices during the course of an election campaign. Remember that the issues raised in most calls are logged for the attention of candidates. Through a simple telephone call members can make sure that education remains high on the agenda of local candidates.

Meeting local candidates

Public meetings of candidates provide an excellent opportunity to raise issues particularly, if a group of members can arrange to attend the meeting together. At such meetings, members can compare the positions of the different parties and share these with their colleagues. Election meetings also can be a chance to increase awareness of educational issues among the wider electorate and can inform the way in which they vote. A Local Association newsletter reporting what was said at the meeting can also be particularly effective, although it is essential to reflect accurately what was said.

Organising meetings of local candidates

NASUWT Local Associations/Federations are well placed to organise meetings of local candidates. Even if many members work outside the local area, it is still worth inviting them to meet and speak with candidates seeking election in the Associations'/Federations' areas.

To be fully effective, these meetings need some advanced planning. Identify three or four dates and times when a meeting could be held and contact the local party office of each main party informing them that you will be inviting the candidate to a public meeting. Offering as many dates as possible and giving good notice makes it more likely those candidates will be able to attend the meeting.

Focus invitations on the main political parties. There is no need to invite single-issue candidates who may be standing in an area.

Under no circumstances should NASUWT organise a platform for the BNP or any other racist or fascist party.

It is usually a good idea to prepare some questions in advance so that the candidates' position on areas of key concern to NASUWT can be tested. The sample questions included in this briefing should help those organising the meeting to do this effectively. Encourage as many members as possible to attend and publicise the outcome of the meeting to members and to the local media if possible. The refusal of any candidate to attend the meeting can also be reported.

Local and national phone-ins

Phone-ins on national and local radio and television take place on a regular basis during election campaigns. All political parties monitor the range of topics covered in phone-in programmes and take the issues raised very seriously, particularly if they demonstrate a developing trend in public opinion. The testimony and views of teachers can be extremely powerful and can often be an authentic counterweight to some of the views on education expressed in phone-ins. Using the NASUWT policy briefings, members will be able to put across clear and consistent messages to politicians as well as the wider electorate.

Internet and telephone surveys

NASUWT members should use opportunities to raise issues of concern to teachers if they are asked for their views by independent polling organisations or by the parties themselves. Opinions registered in surveys organised by political parties, particularly in marginal constituencies, are given a very high priority and their findings can often influence the way in which the parties conduct their campaigns.

Sample questions for political parties and their local candidates

The General Election gives you the chance to put questions to local parliamentary candidates about issues of importance to teachers.

The NASUWT election briefing sheets on key issues may provide you with some ideas of the points to raise. In addition, the questions below can be used.

1. Is your party committed to maintaining a national framework of pay and conditions for teachers?
2. What will your party do to protect teachers' pensions benefits?
3. Is it a priority for your party to work constructively with teacher trade unions and, in particular, would your party maintain the current social partnership arrangements?
4. Would your party honour in full the national agreements reached during the last Parliament on pay and conditions of service as a result of social partnership?
5. Would your party end the punitive naming and shaming culture embodied in the accountability process?
6. How important does your party consider special schools to be in providing high-quality support for pupils and how do you see their role developing?
7. What measures will your party take to ensure that schools have support in tackling pupil indiscipline?
8. What action would your party take to ensure greater transparency and accountability in school budget planning and what action would your party take to prevent schools amassing huge amounts of unspent public money in school balances?
9. How will your party tackle the issues of discrimination and inequality within education for pupils and for teachers?
10. What will your party do to ensure that trade unions have the right to deny membership to persons who are members of racist and fascist organisations?

Sources of Further Information

Contact details for all parties contesting seats in the General Election can be found on the Electoral Commission website:

www.electoralcommission.gov.uk

BBC politics website – lots of useful information about the education policies of the main political parties and background information about constituencies and candidates:

www.bbc.co.uk/politics

United Kingdom Parliament website – contains a useful directory with information about sitting MPs, their constituency offices and further contact details:

www.parliament.uk

Epolitix website – clear, straightforward and up-to-date information about the position of the main parties on key education issues. Also includes an NASUWT mini-site:

www.epolitix.com

Information about local party offices can usually be found in local telephone directories or on campaigning materials distributed by the main parties.

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Working with the Trade Unions

The Issues

- Successive governments have been reluctant to involve teacher trade unions in decision-making on key issues affecting the working lives of their members.
- This often led to a highly adversarial, conflict-based relationship between government and teacher unions with relatively low levels of trust between both parties and little incentive to identify and work on areas of common concern.
- The signing of the historic National Agreement, '*Raising Standards and Tackling Workload*', in January 2003, reversed this trend and heralded a new way of working between Government, teacher and support staff trade unions.
- Based on the principle of social partnership, the National Agreement gave NASUWT and other unions a more effective and influential voice at the heart of government policy-making and has led to real improvements for members on pay, workload and other working conditions, including pupil indiscipline, school security and false allegations.

NASUWT policy

- NASUWT believes that it is important to seek to maintain the social partnership model of working with Government. A relationship based on constructive dialogue is essential if the twin goals of a high-quality education system and high-quality working conditions for teachers are to be achieved.
- Social partnership must be embedded in all areas of the education system and ensure that similar ways of working become established at local authority and school level.
- An incoming government must have a positive commitment to constructive working with trade unions if further progress is to be made.

What the Political Parties Say

Working with the Trade Unions

Labour

“Social partnership between central government and education partners is also a key driver in improving standards. It is a relationship that benefits all of us but most importantly helps to drive up standards for pupils. Social partnership has produced the National Agreement on remodelling and pay and conditions...social partnership facilitates mature and constructive dialogue and enables partners to raise important issues and concerns...”

Stephen Twigg, Minister of State for Schools, to NASUWT Conference, 30 March 2005

Conservatives

“We support anything that helps foster a better relationship between teaching professionals and Government. However, we believe that this relationship will be helped most by Government getting out of the way of teachers and giving them much more freedom to do their jobs.”

Conservative Party article in Teaching Today, February 2005

Liberal Democrats

“A Liberal Democrat government will re-establish the trust between policy-makers and professionals; it will ensure there are adequate resources for education and above all it will be ambitious for every child.”

Joan Walmsley, Liberal Democrat Deputy Home Affairs Spokesperson in the House of Lords, 6 March 2005

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Teachers' Pay

The Issues

- The January 2004 Agreement between NASUWT, other teacher unions, the Employers and Government represented significant progress towards a more fair, equitable and transparent pay structure.
- It also maintained a coherent national pay framework with sufficient local flexibility to address local needs.
- Multi-year pay awards are now becoming the norm for teachers.

NASUWT policy

- Classroom teachers should be able to access higher salaries for remaining committed to the classroom.
- Headteachers and members of the school leadership group should be rewarded for being lead practitioners.
- Multi-year pay awards should be part of an agreed package of further improvements to pay and conditions.
- NASUWT is opposed to local pay and to schools being given more or complete autonomy over teachers' pay and conditions of service. NASUWT is committed to a national framework for pay and conditions.

What the Political Parties Say

Teachers' Pay

Labour

“We should provide (schools) with a clear, improved, (pay) framework within which to operate and then hold them to account. This should provide both the right scope for local decision-making and the confidence that comes from operating an established national framework.”

David Miliband, former Minister of State for Schools, letter to STRB, 1 November 2004

Conservatives

“Our proposals will ensure that all schools will be given the freedom to set pay and conditions to encourage the recruitment and retention of all teachers in any subject in any part of the country.”

Tim Collins, Shadow Secretary of State for Education, 20 September 2004

Liberal Democrats

“Greater freedom to increase pay levels in high-cost areas should be done within the context of a continuing national framework of minimum pay levels which should apply across every region, but with scope for top-ups where local or regional employers so choose. This would give some sense of security to low-cost areas that they would not fall below current salary levels in real terms.”

Liberal Democrat policy paper, ‘Quality, Innovation, Choice’, 2002

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Teachers' Pensions

The Issues

- Pension schemes across the public sector, including the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), are under pressure to raise their normal pension ages from 60 to 65.
- If these plans are taken forward, teachers leaving the profession before they are 65 will not receive their full pension.
- Evidence shows that at present, only a minority of teachers currently reach the retirement age of 60 and very few continue past this age; the majority of retirements are early or because of ill health.
- The TPS is a key part of the terms and conditions on which teachers enter the profession.
- Any worsening of pension benefits is likely to have a negative effect on teacher morale, recruitment and retention.

NASUWT policy

- NASUWT is opposed to any amendments to the TPS that would force teachers to work longer to receive their full pension rights or worsen the current package of benefits available to members of the TPS.
- An incoming government must guarantee that any proposals to review the operation of the TPS are subject to full negotiation with NASUWT and other teacher trade unions with a view to securing an agreed outcome.

What the Political Parties Say

Teachers' Pensions

Labour

“All public sector pensions will have to change – and final salary schemes are becoming rarer for new private sector employees...so the Teachers' Pension Scheme will still be an attractive feature of the overall remuneration package when it comes to recruitment.”

David Miliband, former Minister of State for Schools, article in the TES, 17 July 2003

Conservatives

“We are also heading for two nations in pensions with the traditional final salary pension only surviving in the public sector and very large private corporations. This is already a source of resentment by private sector employers who see their pension schemes closed whilst final salary schemes survive in the public sector. But we haven't seen anything yet.”

David Willetts, Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, 5 July 2004

Liberal Democrats

“It is vitally important that with a rapidly ageing population the Government reviews the public sector pension schemes including the issue of retirement ages. Many people in the private sector have been hit by the recent crisis in the pensions industry, and it is wrong to expect taxpayers to sign a blank cheque for public sector pensions.”

David Laws, Liberal Democrat Treasury Spokesperson, 9 December 2004

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Working Conditions

The Issues

- The historic National Agreement, signed in January 2003, by unions representing the overwhelming majority of teachers, headteachers and support staff, the Government and Employers, has led to significant contractual changes for teachers and headteachers which, when implemented fully, will tackle long-standing problems of teacher workload and bring downward pressure on excessive working hours.
- Nonetheless, teachers continue to face a number of significant workload challenges, many of which are generated at local authority and/or school level.
- Other issues also affect teachers' working lives. For example, teachers remain vulnerable to false, malicious and exaggerated allegations of misconduct and abuse made against them by pupils.
- Physical working conditions for teachers are also a key concern. Many teachers continue to work in sub-standard buildings which lack the facilities and accommodation required by teachers to carry out their full range of responsibilities and to meet the demands of the current teaching role.

NASUWT policy

- NASUWT believes that there is further work to be done on stripping out the remaining parts of teachers' contracts which do not require their professional skills and expertise, leaving them free to focus on teaching and to lead teaching and learning.
- Recent Government proposals in England to deal with false allegations against teachers, to remove from them the trauma of lengthy investigations and exposure to the media, should be introduced in all other parts of the UK.
- The current commitment to invest to rebuild or renovate primary and secondary schools as part of the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme must take full account of the need to develop dedicated and high-quality accommodation within which teachers can work.

What the Political Parties Say

Working Conditions

Labour

“I am very much aware of the devastating effect that false, or unfounded, allegations can have on a teacher’s health, family, and career. The length of time it takes to investigate an allegation and the surrounding publicity can make its impact so much more severe. I am committed to tackling these issues, rapidly, fairly and consistently to better protect teachers from false allegations while at the same time continuing to maintain effective protection for children.”

Charles Clarke, former Education Secretary, 18 November 2004

Conservatives

“The vast majority of teachers accused of abuse are subsequently cleared – but the strain and stress involved, which often includes being spat at in the street and having homes and cars attacked, means that the incidence of suicide among teachers facing this vile accusation is alarmingly high.”

Tim Collins, Shadow Education Secretary, 13 December 2004

Liberal Democrats

“Teachers accused...should not be identified and risk having their photographs splashed over the papers before charges are laid. All too often teachers are accused of actions which later prove to be either malicious or exaggerated but the damage done to career or personal integrity can last a lifetime.”

Phil Willis, Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary, 13 December 2004

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Pupil Indiscipline

The Issues

- There are widespread problems caused by persistent low-level disruption which manifest themselves as verbal abuse, constant challenges to authority and refusal to comply with simple instructions. Such indiscipline is reported increasingly by teachers working in all sectors of education in all parts of the country.
- In serious cases of pupil indiscipline, where a professional judgment is made by the school that a pupil should be excluded, Independent Appeals Panels continue to overturn the decisions of schools and allow back into school previously excluded pupils. This, despite tighter Government guidance on supporting the school's decision.
- Lack of concerted action to tackle problems of pupil indiscipline threatens the working conditions of teachers and also undermines the drive to raise standards of achievement in schools.

NASUWT policy

- NASUWT believes that all teachers are entitled to teach, and all pupils are entitled to learn, in an environment free from intimidation, violence, abuse and persistent disruption.
- Existing school-based systems of appeal which allow parents and pupils a right to put forward their case against decisions of headteachers and governors should be supported and enhanced by central government policy.
- Schools should be supported in taking a zero-tolerance approach to low-level persistent disruption, verbal abuse and violence.
- Schools should be able to access, through a non-bureaucratic process, specialist support to enable them to implement early intervention strategies.
- Local authorities should provide high-quality off-site units which support, on a short or long-term basis, pupils who have been excluded.

What the Political Parties Say

Pupil Indiscipline

Labour

“Parents too must support the school’s behaviour policy and not automatically assume, when their child is punished, that their child must be in the right and the school in the wrong. Where parents do not take responsibility for their child’s unruly behaviour, then it is right that action is taken to ensure that they do, through parenting orders administered by the courts. I believe we must redraw the lines on what is acceptable behaviour. We must support schools when they take a zero tolerance approach to indiscipline.”

Ruth Kelly, Education Secretary, 1 February 2005

Conservatives

“A Conservative Government will give heads and governors complete control over discipline in their schools, including control over admissions and expulsions. Heads will be able to set minimum standards of behaviour, for example in binding home/school contracts, as a condition of admission and continued attendance.”

Conservative Party policy document, ‘Action on Education’, 2004

Liberal Democrats

“Prevention is always better than cure, which is why the Liberal Democrats support smaller class sizes, reducing teacher workload and improvements to the secondary curriculum. We have to create a situation where children want to be in school and tackle bad behaviour before it starts.”

Phil Willis, Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary, 1 February 2005

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Performance Tables

The Issues

- The pressure on schools generated by the introduction of performance league tables in 1993 has led to a narrowing of the curriculum, particularly towards the end of Key Stages and has, thereby, undermined schools' ability to offer a genuinely broad and balanced range of educational experiences to learners.
- Driven by performance league tables, too many teachers have been forced to relegate their professional judgments about learners' best educational interests below the need to ensure that their schools are able to produce results deemed acceptable in terms of their impact on performance table data.
- There is little evidence that performance tables have contributed to raising standards. Teaching to the tests restricts professional autonomy and fosters competition rather than collaboration.

NASUWT policy

- Performance league tables in their current form are discredited and play no effective part in the development of an accurate and practical system of school accountability.
- The performance league tables have led to teachers 'teaching to the tests' and contributed to the clamour for the tests to be abandoned. NASUWT believes that simply replacing tests with more externally moderated teacher assessment would not help to reduce the damage done by performance tables, would still lead to an overemphasis on core subjects in schools and could have serious workload implications for teachers, as emerging evidence in Wales demonstrates.
- Current initiatives such as school self-evaluation, school profiles, data analysis and inspection already provide a stringent accountability framework for schools and make performance league tables redundant.

What the Political Parties Say

Performance Tables

Labour

“You cannot form a judgment about how successful a primary or junior school is simply by looking at the Key Stage 2 results any more than you can a secondary school by looking at their GCSE or Key Stage 3 results. But equally, I don’t believe that we are in a debate between publishing raw results or publishing nothing at all. I think what we have to have – if we are to achieve a really intelligent, sophisticated framework of accountability – is a full, rounded view of how well a school is doing. The results will be one part of that full, rounded view.”

Stephen Twigg, Minister of State for Schools, February 2004

Conservatives

“Under our policy to give parents the right to choose the best school for their children, we will need to ensure that those parents have sufficient information to make an informed choice.”

Conservative Party article, Teaching Today, February 2005

Liberal Democrats

“We...propose to replace government-published national league tables with Annual Progress Reports (APRs)...the APR would contain information about the school and in addition to being sent to parents would be published locally and placed on the LEA’s website for national viewing. (The) second chapter (of the APR) would include information on the comparative performance and progress of the school. Examination results would continue to be reported but this information would be supplemented by information on how the school has performed against a wide range of indicators including wider school activities, pastoral care, parental support, etc.”

Liberal Democrat policy paper, ‘Quality, Innovation, Choice’, 2002

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

OFSTED and Inspection

The Issues

- The unsupportive and flawed inspection frameworks advocated by successive governments have undermined the ability of teachers, as autonomous practitioners, to use their professional judgments.
- The focus on the failure culture has put intolerable pressures on schools and has hindered rather than supported the work that teachers do to meet the best interests of learners.
- Inspection often leads schools into bureaucratically intensive preparation exercises which act as a distraction from teachers' core responsibilities for teaching and learning and which have little to do with raising standards.
- The OFSTED inspection process fails to take account of the fact that a fully rounded and accurate view of the work that schools do with pupils cannot be accurately portrayed by the inspection 'snapshot'.

NASUWT policy

- School inspection is necessary to assess the extent to which those responsible for managing the education system are carrying out their responsibilities effectively and to inform the development of national education policy.
- However, inspection should support and inform the work of teachers and schools not undermine it. Action must be taken to end the 'name and shame' principles on which the current inspection system is based.
- Inspection must not generate additional bureaucratic and workload burdens on schools or act as a distraction from teachers' key responsibilities for teaching and learning or from headteachers' responsibilities for leading teaching and learning.

What the Political Parties Say

OFSTED and Inspection

Labour

“The new inspection regime will give a sharper picture of a school’s effectiveness. It will start from the school’s own evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, look at the school’s key systems for improvement and observe lessons. It will take into account the views of parents and all concerned with the school. It will produce shorter, more accessible inspection reports for parents.”

Ruth Kelly, Education Secretary, 14 March 2005

Conservatives

“Schools will continue to be reviewed by OFSTED against established criteria. If a school is identified as failing, the governors will be required to put in place an action plan with a view to turning the school around quickly...schools will still have to satisfy OFSTED that they offer an acceptable standard of education.”

Conservative Party policy document ‘Right to Choose: Education Edition’, 2005

Liberal Democrats

“The Liberal Democrats believe we can cut unnecessary educational red tape by scrapping OFSTED and moving its core functions to the independent Audit Commission. For most teachers OFSTED means unnecessary paperwork, increased stress and time away from the real work of teaching. Under Liberal Democrat plans, the Audit Commission will act neither as a tool of the profession nor of Whitehall, but offer strategic reviews focused on the schools that need it most.”

Phil Willis MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary, 6 March 2005

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Extended Services for Children

The Issues

- The lack of interconnectivity between local services for children has caused problems for schools on a regular basis.
- In developing a more coherent approach, there is a need to retain a strong local focus on education in all reforms designed to enhance the provision of joined-up children's services.
- Extended schools offer the potential for real benefits for local communities but they must neither reduce schools' ability to focus on their core responsibilities for teaching and learning nor result in teachers and headteachers working longer hours.
- In taking forward other major changes, such as the creation of Directors of Children's Services posts, there is the potential for excessive variation in practice between local authorities. This could lead to inefficiencies in delivering future national initiatives on children's issues.

NASUWT policy

- Central government must take overall responsibility for the delivery of effective and manageable change to the provision for children's services.
- All local authorities should have a high-level 'champion' of education to make sure that issues of concern to parents, pupils and teachers can be raised effectively.
- The roll-out of extended services in schools must not add workload burdens to teachers and must make sure that schools are not distracted from their core educational activities.
- The commitment already received by NASUWT from central government that extended schools will not mean extended hours for teachers and headteachers must be maintained by an incoming government.

What the Political Parties Say

Extended Services for Children

Labour

“For children aged 11-14 we will ensure that by 2008, a third of secondary schools will be extended schools open from 8am-6pm offering a range of exciting activities to children both in the school and in the surrounding area. A crucial milestone towards a universal offer by the end of a third term – when we expect all children aged 11-14 to be able to engage in a full range of these activities after school and in the holidays.”

Prime Minister, Tony Blair, 11 November 2004

“We do not expect schools and teachers to make these extended offers alone. The Children’s Trust will help to bring together schools with voluntary and community sector providers who can help; and broker imaginative solutions that do not involve extra work for teachers.”

DfES – Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners 2004

Conservatives

“We want to develop a whole range of new after-school clubs. We don’t think that it should only be schools that provide them or that schools should be forced to run them. We would let parents and headteachers make the choice that was right for their school and we would allow community or faith groups to apply to provide the clubs, if there was a demand for them.”

Theresa May, Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for the Family, 7 March 2005

Liberal Democrats

“The concept of extended schools has long been one that Liberal Democrats have supported. To use primary school buildings, facilities and playing fields beyond the school day makes good sense.”

Annette Brooke, Liberal Democrat Shadow Spokesperson for Children, 8 September 2004

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Children with Special Educational Needs

The Issues

- Inappropriately applied policies of inclusion by successive governments have marginalised the role and status of special schools and that of highly skilled and experienced teachers and other professionals who work in them.
- Teachers in mainstream schools often face the professional frustration of attempting to meet the complex and diverse needs of pupils with special needs without suitable support structures, resources and training.
- Inclusion policies let down many pupils with SEN and deprive them of the full range of opportunities and specialist provision to which they are entitled.
- Not enough local authorities give a sufficiently high priority to the provision of high- quality SEN support services for pupils and teachers in either mainstream or special schools.

NASUWT policy

- NASUWT believes that every child with SEN has the right to a high-quality education, within an inclusive education service, which offers a diverse range of provision, including special schools.
- Policies on SEN provision must be based on objective assessments of children's needs and how they will be met. The debate should not be distorted by preconceived ideological notions which assume that inclusion in mainstream schools, regardless of circumstances, is necessarily better.
- Local authorities must make sure that they provide adequate levels of specialist SEN provision and fund this provision appropriately.
- Policies of local authorities which lead to the closure of special schools must be reversed.

What the Political Parties Say

Children with Special Educational Needs

Labour

“There is too much variation in provision for children with SEN in different parts of the country. This situation where children still face real barriers to learning and parents lack confidence in the commitment and capacity of our schools to meet their child’s needs cannot be allowed to continue.”

Charles Clarke, former Education Secretary, 11 February 2004

Conservatives

“Of course a lot of children with special needs can be taught in mainstream schools – and where it is right for them, they should be. But the fashionable presumption that children with special needs should all go into mainstream education is wrong...a Conservative government will give parents whose children have special needs the right to choose how and where their children are educated – ending the closure of popular special schools.”

Michael Howard, Leader of the Conservative Party, 7 March 2005

Liberal Democrats

“Over the past 20 years thousands of children with special needs, who would previously have only had the option of attending a special school, have been successfully educated with their peers in mainstream schools. Inclusion of children with special needs cannot be a cheap alternative to special schools. It can only work when all staff are adequately trained to support children with learning difficulties or other special needs.”

Phil Willis, Liberal Democrat Shadow Education Secretary, 7 March 2005

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

Equality

The Issues

- Despite positive changes to the law, it is clear that many teachers still face discrimination on grounds which include ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief and age.
- Discrimination continues to prevent too many teachers from securing employment, teaching their preferred age groups or subjects, being paid equal pay for work of equal value and gaining fair access to promotion opportunities.
- Schools and colleges continue to receive inadequate support for their efforts to recognise diversity, challenge discrimination and promote greater equality of opportunity.
- Racist and fascist organisations are increasingly seeking to infiltrate schools, colleges and trades unions to spread their message of hate.

NASUWT policy

- NASUWT believes that teachers and pupils have the right to work and learn in an education system that tackles discrimination and is actively committed to genuine equality of opportunity.
- All employers of teachers should be required legally to deliver genuine equality of opportunity and to tackle all forms of workplace discrimination, without exception.
- Despite recent welcome changes in legislation, trade unions must be given more effective rights to deny membership to members of fascist and racist organisations.

What the Political Parties Say

Equality

Labour

“Every one of us should have the chance to fulfil our potential, live with respect and dignity and not face the fear of prejudice, discrimination and hate. This is why we must build on and strengthen work to overcome discrimination based on race, gender and disability, as well as the new strands of religious belief, sexual orientation and age.”

Patricia Hewitt, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, 12 May 2004

Conservatives

“To fight discrimination we must not practice discrimination. Positive discrimination is outdated and unjust. It sets family against family, and leads ethnic communities to doubt their own abilities. The real solution to discrimination is to give people the opportunity to get on in life and get on with their lives.”

Michael Howard, Leader of the Conservative Party, 26 November 2004

Liberal Democrats

“Equal access to education is crucial for achieving equality of opportunity. Really high quality education for all is vital, especially for ethnic groups that may be disadvantaged initially by poverty, English as a second language, and so forth.”

‘Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Ethnic Minorities’, 2005

NASUWT Election Policy Briefing

School Funding

The Issues

- The increased investment by Government in education has been welcome.
- The current funding mechanism for schools, based on local management of schools, introduced in 1987, is fundamentally flawed as regardless of the level of investment, it creates a system of winners and losers and perpetuates the perception of underfunding.
- Recently strategies have been introduced to improve the system and to establish budget predictability and stability through the introduction of minimum per pupil guarantees and a proposal for three-year budgets.
- However, problems still remain, including the ability of schools to stockpile money in school balances, lack of democratic control over school budgets and budget mismanagement by some schools.

NASUWT policy

- The introduction of appropriate democratic controls over a school's expenditure of public money.
- Greater transparency in the school budget process.
- The introduction of measures to prevent stockpiling of money in school balances.
- The establishment of a legal requirement to consult school workforce unions on school budget planning.

What the Political Parties Say

School Funding

Labour

“Every penny meant for schools must get to them. We will therefore introduce guaranteed three-year budgets for every school from 2006, geared to pupil numbers, with a minimum per pupil increase for every school each year. That dedicated schools’ budget will be guaranteed by national Government and delivered through local authorities.”

Charles Clarke, former Education Secretary, 8 July 2004

Conservatives

“Under a Conservative Government, the parents of all school-age children... will be able to take the money that the taxpayer spends on their child’s education to any school – whether state or independent – that can offer a good education as long as no charge is made to parents.”

Conservative Party policy document, ‘Right to Choose: Education Issue’ 2004

Liberal Democrats

“Local authorities should take on full responsibility for funding school and pre-school education up to the age of 14 through local income tax...(the) Learning and Skills Council will be replaced with regional bodies, working under the political direction of the regional assemblies.”

Liberal Democrat policy paper, ‘Quality, Innovation Choice’ 2002

What the Political Parties Say

Scottish National Party

Working with the Trade Unions

“The SNP will introduce an Education Convention with representatives of teachers, parents, pupils, and employers and wider civic Scotland.”

2005 SNP Manifesto

McCrone

“While we welcome any increase in resources being spent on education in Scotland, the key issue is how much is reaching children not only in theory but in practice and in turn, actually impacting on pupil attainment. The truth is that the funding announced by the Education Minister today has been swallowed up in implementing the McCrone Agreement – over £860 million to date.”

Fiona Hyslop, SNP Education Spokesperson, 18 January 2005

The Scottish Executive’s review of the Curriculum

“Rationing the curriculum will prevent flexibility and choice for pupils. This smacks of a shortage of teachers and cost cutting at the SQA rather than a proper curriculum review. The actual National Curriculum Review is much delayed and this simple result will not address the problem. We do need relevance in the curriculum, but once these Highers are killed off it will be very difficult to reinstate them in the future.”

Fiona Hyslop, SNP Education Spokesperson, 22 October 2004

Plans for Educational Reform

“The glaring omission in these proposals is the failure to champion the raising of standards for all. There are welcome changes but these will impact at the margins for a relatively small number of pupils whereas what we need are measures to provide a national impetus to realise national ambitions for education.”

Fiona Hyslop, SNP Education Spokesperson, 1 November 2004

Power for Headteachers

“I welcome the commitment to give headteachers more control and more devolution of budgets but it is not that long ago this Executive were trying the hands of headteachers on targets for excluding pupils on discipline matters.”

Fiona Hyslop, SNP Education Spokesperson, 1 November 2004

Plaid Cymru

Extended Services in Schools

“The concept of educare – in which all care is educational, and all education involves caring – will be the foundation of our policy. In order to ensure that the principle is put into practice...will establish in the Government of Wales a Department of Education and Children...to bring together all the elements. This will take responsibility for all services...and encourage the further development of the county-based Early Years Partnerships...”

2003 Plaid Cymru Manifesto

Working with the Trade Unions

“While education is a national service, we propose the further development of the General Teaching Council (GTCW) as an independent body for the profession with responsibility for recruitment, initial teacher training and education for teachers...and appraisal and performance management.”

2003 Plaid Cymru Manifesto

Pay and Conditions

“We will seek primary legislation to: devolve the powers for setting the terms and conditions for teachers.”

From ‘Teaching Profession for Wales’ by David Egan (A Plaid Cymru discussion paper)

Working with the Trade Unions

“Plaid Cymru should encourage moves to professional unity, as a way of strengthening the teaching profession. The aim should be to create a Wales Teachers’ Association. Whilst Plaid will need to respect the right of these voluntary organisations to decide their own future and, ultimately, the decision of teachers as to which association/union, if any, they wish to join, it should provide strong encouragement to the unions to achieve this end. The organisations represented in Wales would need to consider this with their parent, England and Wales organisations...It could be suggested to these bodies, that Wales might be used as a fast track...towards professional unity.”

From ‘Teaching Profession for Wales’ by David Egan (A Plaid Cymru discussion paper)