

# SCPO Briefing Paper 9/3

## Briefings from Manifestos - 2

### EDUCATION

*This is one of a series of SCPO Briefing Papers in which we are taking the topics identified by the churches as key election issues and summarising the Manifesto commitments on these themes of the parties now represented in Parliament. In the new situation, all of these are significant background to coming policy.*

#### Early years

- The SNP, Labour and the Lib Dems all want to increase the provision of free nursery education. The SNP want to increase provision for 3 and 4 year olds by 50% - increasing the entitlement from 400 to 600 hours a year. Both Labour and the Lib Dems want to expand the number of free hours of early years education from 12.5 hours per week to 15 hours and to increase the number of weeks in which children receive free nursery education to 38 weeks per year to match the current school year.
- Labour would expand nursery education for 10,000 two year olds (those "who need it the most"), while the Lib Dems would provide free playgroup places for 2 year olds for up to 15 hours per week. The Lib Dems would like to double the number of playgroups in Scotland.
- The SNP said that they want every nursery age child (starting with children in deprived communities) to have access to a fully qualified nursery teacher. Labour also promised that by 2011 they would ensure that an Early Years Professional would lead every early years and childcare facility. The Lib Dems and the Greens want to improve the training of childcare staff. The Lib Dems would have a 10 year Integrated Early Years and Childcare Strategy to build capacity and improve training across all parts of the early years workforce.
- The Greens would like the quality of childcare and daycare to improve along the lines of the Danish model of 'pedagogues'.
- The Conservatives said that it should be left to parents to decide with which nursery they should use their 12½ hour free weekly entitlement. To help parents combine this with childcare requirements, the Conservatives would encourage all employers to make salary-sacrifice childcare vouchers available to their employees.

#### School

##### **Buildings**

- The SNP said that they would match the current school building programme, and offer an alternative funding mechanism through the Scottish Futures Trust. Labour said they would accelerate the school building programme and re-build 250 more Scottish schools in the next term of Parliament, with at least 100 new schools completed by 2009. The Lib Dems also said that they would deliver 250 new and refurbished schools.
- The SNP said that they would prioritise making school grounds and facilities more accessible after school hours and during weekends. Labour would also open school buildings for the community to use.
- Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens would like to see every school achieving "eco school" status and (for Labour and Lib Dems) working towards green flag status. Labour would aim for all new schools to become carbon neutral buildings.
- The Conservatives would like local authorities to be responsible for the provision of the school infrastructure on the grounds that they can do so in accordance with their local needs and plans.

## **Class sizes**

- The SNP want to reduce class sizes in P1-3 to 18 pupils or less but give head teachers power to decide on the most appropriate class sizes in later years, within national guidelines. Labour said they would reduce class sizes year on year and improve pupil/teacher ratios; they would also agree a plan to bring class sizes below the OECD average. The Lib Dems would cut classes in P1-P3 to a maximum of 25 pupils. The Greens called for all primary school classes to have no more than 20 pupils.
- The Conservatives said that head teachers should be allowed to set classes according to pupil standards.

## **Discipline**

- The SNP said that they would examine models of single teacher support in S1 to tackle behaviour and guidance issues. Labour would specify in legislation the framework for a Discipline Code in every school to set out rights and responsibilities for head teachers to exclude pupils and maintain discipline. The Lib Dems also support the option of exclusion. The Conservatives said that they would let head teachers be responsible for discipline.
- Labour also promised to expand and fund additional designated places to support disruptive pupils and to protect other children. Initiatives to deal with behavioural problems would include "chill out zones" and "pit stops". Both Labour and the Lib Dems support the use of off-site units as a way of moderating children's behaviour and reintegrating them into schools.
- Labour would create school wardens in problem areas, to improve safety and security for pupils on the way to and from school etc.
- The Lib Dems want a systematic approach to early intervention from primary level, to ensure consistently disruptive pupils are given attention early on, and tracked through the school system.

## **Parents**

- Labour want to introduce 'Parent/School Contracts', so parents know what they can expect from schools and in return parents know what is expected of them by schools.
- The Lib Dems would give head teachers new powers to require parents to attend meetings with head teachers or education authorities, backed up by easier-to-understand information about each child's progress.
- The Conservatives want to reinstate school boards.
- The Greens support the rights of parents to choose to educate their children at home and oppose means testing of support for home tuition.

## **Rural schools**

- The SNP, Conservatives and Greens gave support to rural schools; the SNP said they would introduce a legislative presumption against closure of rural schools and tighten the regulations for closing all schools, while the Conservatives would set up a £5m annual Rural Schools Support Fund for the exclusive purpose of supporting schools earmarked for closure by the local authority; the Greens said that they would resist downgrading or closure and would develop rural schools.

## **Staff**

- The SNP would maintain teacher numbers in the face of falling school rolls which would cut class sizes and they would place greater emphasis on teacher recruitment for early years, languages and science. Labour said that they would guarantee to have and retain at least 53,000 fully-trained teachers by the start of the new school year. The Lib Dems would recruit 1,000 more teachers, to cut class sizes.

- As a way of blurring the division between secondary and primary school Labour would encourage more secondary school teachers to use their specialisms to teach in primary schools and more primary school teachers to use their approaches in secondary schools. The Lib Dems want all secondary schools to develop transition partnerships with their feeder primary schools building on best practice.
- The Conservatives would require head teachers to have a programme for the continued professional development (CPD) of their teaching staff and that CPD engagement should be a requirement for continued registration as a teacher. The Greens would invest in the Chartered Teacher scheme.

### **Subjects**

- The SNP, Labour and the Lib Dems want to put a much greater emphasis on science and modern languages in the curriculum. The Conservatives also want councils to come up with a strategy for the teaching of sciences and technology. The SNP would introduce Scottish Baccalaureates in Science and Languages. Labour said they would introduce a LABS (Languages and Basic Science) programme into every primary school and would create 6 Science Centres of Excellence for upper school pupils in local comprehensive schools. The Lib Dems want to see practical science lessons taking place in every primary school and would develop a comprehensive National Languages Strategy, with a rolling programme to introduce a second language early into the primary curriculum.
- The SNP and the Lib Dems want more financial education.
- The Greens propose a fundamental updating of the curriculum, drawing on the work of the Curriculum Review Group and aiming to place an emphasis on the personal development of each individual.

### **Vocational learning**

- The SNP would like to expand school-college partnerships for S3 and S4 so that all pupils can experience vocational learning; they would give vocational skills parity of esteem with academic qualifications. They would also investigate the option of elective time in the school week to free up time for vocational opportunities. Labour want to create 100 skills academies so 14-18 year olds have the opportunity to learn new skills for work and gain vocational qualifications. The Conservatives support a pilot scheme for a city academy in Glasgow which might pave the way for the roll out of schools specialising in vocational skills, music, drama, arts, sport, science, or anything else for which there is demand. (The Greens reject the current model of skills academies.) The Lib Dems would also like to roll out the Skills for Work courses across Scotland to improve opportunities for 14 to 16 year olds to undergo vocational and work based training to learn a trade and new skills. The Greens said that they would like formal links between schools and the further education sector to be developed to allow children wishing to pursue vocational training options to do so in an adult setting.
- The Conservatives would establish a new Scottish Skills Agency with a total budget of £170m, which would be responsible for giving young people basic numeracy, literacy and people skills needed in the workplace.
- The Lib Dems want to pilot new business incubators in schools and further education colleges which can attract and develop young people who are liable to fall into the NEET category.

### **Miscellaneous - school**

- The SNP and Labour would continue to support denominational schools as long as parents want them. The Greens however would move towards the integration of state-funded religious schools into non-denominational education.
- The SNP would guarantee in law the right to a Gaelic medium education at primary level, where reasonable demand exists. They would also set a target to expand the number of children in

Gaelic medium education within their first term. Labour would increase the number of Gaelic medium teachers and Lib Dems would improve the availability of Gaelic medium primary and secondary education.

- The SNP oppose exam league tables in favour of a more balanced set of measures reflecting the social circumstances of each school's catchment area.
- The SNP said that they would review the operation and implementation of mainstreaming of children with additional support needs, creating an Additional Support Fund to improve services for children with additional support needs. Labour supported the availability of choice between special schools and mainstream schools for children with additional needs; they would give head teachers budgets to help them mainstream children with additional needs into their schools. The Conservatives would also ensure that parents of children with special needs have a reasonable choice about whether their children are taught in a mainstream or special school.
- Labour would make leaving school before 18 conditional on a young person staying meaningfully engaged in higher or further education, skills training, work or volunteering.
- The Conservatives would empower head teachers to retain an administrative budget competence, enabling them to bid directly to the Executive for specific projects at their school.

## University/college

### **Fees & loans**

- The SNP, Lib Dems and Greens all said they would abolish the Graduate Endowment fee, while Labour remain committed to the Graduate Endowment "as a means of financing young people from the poorest families to study in higher education"; the Conservatives also said that they had no difficulty with the idea of a student contributing towards the cost of their education - regardless of their background - to borrow as much money as they need to complete their course.
- The SNP would replace the Student Loans system with means-tested student grants, to remove the burden of debt repayments owed by Scottish domiciled and resident graduates. The Greens would also bring back student grants.
- Labour would raise the amount of the student loan available to each student but would build upon the introduction of student bursary grants and educational maintenance allowances to support those whose financial position might discourage them from continuing in education. The Lib Dems would also support students most in need through maintenance grants and bursaries and they would increase the level of bursaries given to the poorest students above inflation.
- The Lib Dems would launch a review of means testing in Higher Education and consider introducing a new minimum income guarantee for students, met through varying combinations of bursaries, loans and parental contributions. The Greens would guarantee a minimum income for students, which they say would be part of their move towards a national citizen's income scheme.
- Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens said that they would not introduce top up tuition fees. The Greens would also scrap the top-up fees currently in place for medical students from other parts of the UK.
- The Conservatives would establish a Commission which would investigate the issue of student debt and finance. They would ask the Commission to consider the effectiveness of commercialising the student loan book in order to expand the amount of financial assistance available for students.
- Labour and the Lib Dems would review the financial support system for part time students.
- The Greens say that further education students also need greater financial support while studying at college.