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11 October 2012

Pocket Watch: Top 10 education messages from the Party Conference season

Introduction

The Conference season for the major Parties is over for another year with a number of education announcements made over the last few weeks. Here, in chronological order, is a top 10 listing

1. *More money for disadvantaged pupils under the pupil premium.* Announced early in the Lib-Dem Conference by new Schools Minister David Laws, this had three elements: an increase in the per pupil amount in 2013 to £900; a further £100m in 2013 and 2104 for summer schools that help disadvantaged pupils with the transition to secondary; an emphasis on funding accountability
2. *Lending support for small and mid-sized businesses.* Further details on this will follow this autumn but essentially this is to be a new business bank, with up to £10bn of public and private investment, to help provide much needed finance for small and mid-sized businesses. It was announced by Vince Cable
3. *Extra money to help with English and maths.* This came in Nick Clegg's Leader's speech and forms part of the pupil premium offering. Described as a 'catch-up premium,' it will provide, from this year, £500 for any pupil who leaves primary school without the requisite levels in English and maths
4. *Funding will be tight whoever wins the next election.* Ed Balls used his speech to the Labour Conference to declare that should they be elected in 2015, Labour would "hold a zero-based spending review that will look at every pound spent by Government." For the present, he confirmed the importance of investing in skills and opportunities for young people and announced that ODA Chair, Sir John Armitt, would lead a group on planning/infrastructure
5. *Strengthening BIS as an enterprise Dept.* In his speech, Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umanna announced that he had asked Lord Adonis to lead a group of business leaders and former Ministers to come up with a blueprint to transform BIS into a leading enterprise Dept
6. *A new Youth Jobs Taskforce.* This was announced by Shadow Work and Pensions Minister Liam Byrne. It builds on Labour's previous Jobs for Youth work and aims to bring together leading players to tackle some of the country's worst youth unemployment 'hot spots'
7. *A new Tech Bacc for 16-19 year olds.* This was one of the headline announcements in Ed Miliband's speech along with further announcements about enhancing apprenticeship opportunities. The Tech Bacc builds on proposals from Lord Adonis but would be informed by a review of 14-19 provision being led by Chris Husbands. The Tech Bacc would incorporate English/maths, an accredited level 3 qualification and structured work experience with a supply chain into business owned apprenticeships
8. *A New Deal for Teachers.* This came in Stephen Twigg's speech with proposals to increase the number of Teach First recruits, to write off part of their tuition fees for graduates who go on to teach in deprived areas and to create a National College for Teaching Excellence
9. *More flexible employee contracts.* These were announced as part of George Osborne's speech and build on the European model of mini jobs discussed over the summer. Intended to help stimulate jobs particularly in new businesses, the employee would give up certain rights to take up employment but in return be granted share rights on which the Government would charge no capital gains tax
10. *Education for all.* This was one of the three themes, along with welfare reform and creating a growth economy, identified by David Cameron in his Leader's speech as critical for the future of this country. The education challenge was to make excellence available for all



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Party Conference Top Ten Oct 2012