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Pocket Watch – The Lib-Dems set out their 2015 education proposals

Introduction

This week the Lib-Dems published what they're calling their **pre-Manifesto**, a list of proposals for the future which will be debated and voted on at their Conference in a few weeks time and which may then end up being included in the Party's 2015 Election Manifesto next spring. With the polls indicating a closely fought contest in next year's general election, the Lib-Dems may yet find themselves courted on all sides so these proposals are likely to be closely scrutinised. For education, the wish list runs to 28 propositions covering each stage of learning from early years to higher education although perhaps based on recent experience, the four under HE are cautiously phrased and on funding at least include only a promise to include the fees issue in any future *"review of higher education finance within the next Parliament."*

What are the headline proposals?

The stand out proposal is the promise to *"protect the education budget in real terms right through from the early years to age 19,"* a pledge announced by Nick Clegg earlier in the summer and included here as a way of driving up school and young people's standards. Given that both major Parties are committed to continuing funding efficiencies for at least the first year of the new Parliament, it may prove difficult to deliver but has an obvious appeal in that it would not only bolster early years provision but would see off the sort of raid on the funding for 18 year olds that we've witnessed this year.

Other notable proposals include help with transport to school and college for 16-21 year olds in the form of a discounted bus pass, paid for by scrapping the Winter Fuel Allowance and free TV licence for wealthier pensioners, those on the higher rate of tax. For older learners, the Party proposes, perhaps controversially given past experience, to introduce lifelong learning accounts while for disadvantaged school pupils, the Party will take to the hills to *"at least protect the schools' Pupil Premium in real terms."* On the vexed issue of school standards, it will borrow the Stephen Twigg proposal and set up an independent Educational Standards Authority to take *"responsibility for curriculum content and exam standards"* and ensure that all state-funded schools at least offer a minimum curriculum core. On vocational education it has less to say sticking at this stage just to a desire to *"improve the quality of vocational education."*

What happens now?

The theory is that after this autumn's Party Conference, the Party will get down to firming up its final Manifesto which will be written by a Manifesto Working Group chaired by Schools Minister David Laws and be published next March. When it comes to education, the five big ticket items likely to appear include the following:

- A cradle to college funding pledge
- A revolution in the quality of early years education
- A parental guarantee (in state schools) of a core curriculum taught by qualified teachers
- *"Swift action"* to support and challenge weak schools and colleges
- A discounted bus pass for 16-21 yr olds



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Lib Dem Education Manifesto Sept 2014