

## Recent announcements from the party conference season

### Clegg announces new summer school scheme

Speaking to his party conference in Birmingham on Wednesday, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg announced a new education initiative. In a section of his speech on the recent riots, he observed about the young people involved that “too many of these young people had simply fallen through the cracks. Not just this summer but many summers ago, when they lost touch with their own future. So often the people who have gone off the rails are the ones who were struggling years earlier, not least in making that critical leap from primary to secondary school.”

The Government were therefore going to introduce a new scheme of summer schools that would give the most vulnerable children extra help in maths and English. The £50 million scheme would fund two weeks of summer school at the end of the primary phase. However, this is not new money. It would be taken from the £625 million pupil premium funding.

Commenting on the proposal, Christine Blower, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: “Tackling the root causes of the riots will not be solved by a two week summer school for primary children. What is needed are policies which address the growing inequalities in our society...The Academies programme has been shown to exacerbate social division through their admissions and exclusions policy. Free Schools are likely to do the same as they have shown to do so in Sweden...The Government needs to be aware that resolving issues of disadvantage cannot be achieved without structured and well planned support throughout a pupil's schooling. What will make the difference to pupils who need additional help is ongoing support for literacy and numeracy such as one to one tuition and reading recovery programmes, both of which the Government recently announced would be axed.”

### Cameron: education the route to success

The Prime Minister seized the banner of education as he wound up the Conservative Party conference in Manchester on Wednesday. In a quite theatrical ending, against a backdrop of a large number of young people on stage just before David Cameron spoke, the Prime Minister asked in his speech, who would lift up the poorest in society? The answer, of course, was that he would and **“that starts with a good education – for everyone,”** he said.

Yet doing that would be hard. “It’s hard because our education system has been infected by an ideology that instead of insisting on every child’s success has too often made excuses for failure.” Whether it was poor children, black boys or under-achieving neighbourhoods, there was always a reason why some children could not be expected to do better. Cameron said he was “disgusted by the idea that we should aim for any less for a child from a poor background than a rich one”.

Mr Cameron claimed that there was now “irrefutable proof that the right schools, with the right freedoms and the right leadership, can transform the education of the most deprived children”. The answer was more freedom, more leadership and more academies and free schools.

Christine Blower, general secretary of the NUT, was also hostile. She said: "Yet again we see the myth being peddled that the academies and Free Schools programmes are the answer to a good education in this country. The Prime Minister knows just as well as his education secretary that it is good leadership, teaching and proper funding which makes a difference in schools, not its status."

## So....are academies the answer?

The big increase in the number of schools becoming academies was at the heart of Michael Gove's speech to the Conservative Party conference in Liverpool this week. The Education Secretary said that the 1,000<sup>th</sup> school to convert to an academy had done so this week. Since the passage of the Academies Act last July, more than 1,500 schools had applied to become academies and 1,031 had succeeded. In addition, there were 319 sponsored academies established by the last government. One million children are now educated in academies. While the huge expansion of academies pleased the party faithful in the audience it caused alarm on the conference fringe. Speaking at a meeting organised by the NUT, ASCL and CSN a number of speakers expressed concern at the rapid growth of this untried system.

Kevin Courtney, deputy general secretary of the NUT, was concerned that the rapid move to academies "was a revolution not tried anywhere else". The last time that a Bill had been rushed through parliament as quickly as the Academies Act last year had been the Dangerous Dogs Act, and that had not ended well.

OECD research, including that published in *Education at a Glance 2011* published last month, had been ambivalent. Programmes like academies and free schools had worked in some countries but not in others. (Interestingly, in Sweden, which is where the Conservatives got the idea of free schools from, they have actually lowered standards.) The two key factors in ensuring success were a sound framework of accountability and an emphasis on schools cooperating. If the system was based on competition leading to a free-for-all then academies and free schools would fail.

## GCSEs return to traditional examinations

This week it was announced that GCSEs are to return to the traditional model of end-of-course examinations. This is in contrast to the current system, where students take many exams during the course of the year, covering small topics, which allows them to re-sit any unit to boost their overall scores.

Fears have risen that the current GCSE system does not allow for enough time for pupils to truly understand their subjects. Ofqual, the qualifications watchdog, claims that around 600,000 students who are starting their GCSE's in 2012 will be required to sit traditional end-of-course examinations in the summer term.

These plans mean that it will no longer be possible to retake units, suggesting that the whole course will be tested at once. This idea stems from the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, who announced that modules encourage schools to train children "again and again to clear the hurdle of examination" rather than focusing on the teaching and understanding of a subject as a whole.

## Other recent announcements/reports of interest

### Draft School Improvement Framework published by Ofsted

Ofsted has now published the [draft framework](#) for school inspection, which is expected to be introduced from January 2010. The framework will remain a draft until the Education Bill completes its passage through Parliament. The new regime reflects ‘the importance of inspection focusing even more extensively on the quality of teaching when judging the quality of the school, with inspectors spending most of their time in classrooms’. The new framework will: reduce the scope of inspection and the number of judgements that are required; further increase the proportion of inspectors’ time in school that is spent observing teaching and gathering evidence of learning, progress and behaviour; enable schools to request an inspection and for Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (HMCI) to charge for this; discontinue the expectation that schools complete a standard self-evaluation form, although inspectors will take account of any summary of self-evaluation evidence that they present. From 2012, the inspection will focus on: the achievement of pupils at the school; the quality of teaching in the school; the quality of leadership and management of the school; the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school. Ofsted has also published the [evaluation schedule](#) that provides outline guidance and grade descriptors for the judgements that inspectors will report on.

### Dyscalculia and neuro-science

Chris Husbands, director of the Institute of Education London University, welcomes the development of new software resources designed specifically to help children with dyscalculia, based on brain research showing underlying neurological problems. Writing in his regular column in the just published current issue of *Education Journal* magazine, he writes that “a world-wide effort by scientists and educators has established the neural network that supports arithmetic, and revealed abnormalities in this network in the brains of dyscalculic learners. Neuroscience research shows what kind of help is most needed – strengthening number concepts. This can be achieved with appropriate specially-designed teaching schemes, which can be supported by game-like software that adapts to the learner’s current level of competence.”

### DfE publications

The Department for Education recently published the following document of note for us:

***Interim Percentage of Pupils Making Expected Progress in English and in Mathematics between Key Stage One and Key Stage Two in England 2010-11*** on 29 September 2011. These statistics provide a short time series of the percentage of pupils making progress in English and mathematics between key stage one and key stage two. It can be downloaded free from <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001023/index.shtml>