



# The 2017 election manifestos – what do they mean for our members?

Most of the 2017 Westminster election manifestos are now published. There is plenty of analysis out there (see for example the [Kings Fund](#) on health and social care policies generally), but how would the main parties' pledges affect the professional interests of Council members? Here we take a quick look at the manifestos through the lens of the Council's five policy portfolios: workforce, international, teaching and learning, research and regulation.

Read the election manifestos in full here:

Conservatives – [Forward, Together](#)

Labour – [For The Many Not The Few](#)

Liberal Democrats – [Change Britain's Future](#)

Plaid Cymru – [Action Plan 2017](#)

SNP – [Stronger for Scotland](#)

## How will the election affect members in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

The general election on 8 June will determine who is elected to Westminster, but the UK government's power to make laws across all policy areas, including health and education, is limited. The Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly have responsibility for determining health and education policies in their respective devolved administrations.

## Workforce

### Brexit

This election has been described as a Brexit election. The UK's departure from the EU is likely to have significant implications for the current and future health and social care workforce, impacting recruitment, retention and associated policies around the growth of the domestic workforce. Around 1 in 20 nurses, midwives and allied health registered professionals

### 2017 election manifestos

#### Purpose:

This paper outlines how the main parties' pledge affect the professional interests of Council members

#### Council of Deans of Health contact for more information:

Fleur Nielsen  
[Fleur.Nielsen@cod-health.ac.uk](mailto:Fleur.Nielsen@cod-health.ac.uk)

in the UK are from the EU. The proportion of EU staff is similar within our members' university faculties.

The Council has called on the next government to rapidly guarantee the rights of EU citizens working in the UK to secure stability for healthcare and higher education. Labour, Liberal Democrats, SNP and Plaid Cymru have all committed to doing this. The Liberal Democrats have also pledged to simplify the process and requirements for obtaining permanent residence and UK citizenship. The Conservative party has pledged to seek assurances for EU staff working in the NHS as part of the Brexit negotiations but it has also committed to reduce future net immigration to the tens of thousands. In general, the Conservatives are not planning to guarantee the rights of EU citizens until the rights of UK citizens living in other EU member states have been secured.

### **Workforce planning**

Unsurprisingly, healthcare workforce planning features in all the main manifesto documents.

The Conservatives have pledged to help universities and local health systems work more closely together to develop roles and skills. They have also said that they will ensure that the NHS and social care systems have the health professionals required, though there is little detail about what this might entail.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats are both committed to producing a national workforce strategy or long term workforce plan for the health service. Labour has also said it would legislate for (unspecified) safe staffing levels. This would be more in line with policies governing safe and effective staffing in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and would be welcomed by many, including the RCN which has explicitly called for such measures.

There are few specific commitments to workforce numbers, though Labour has pledged to increase health visitor and school nurse numbers, Plaid Cymru has committed to recruiting an additional 5,000 nurses for Wales and the Conservatives have committed to recruiting 10,000 additional mental health professionals.

It is notable that all three parties commit heavily to a raft of mental health policies, ranging from workforce to funding and research.

### **Workforce development**

In our own manifesto document, the Council focused on the importance of developing existing staff. Disappointingly, this is not a theme that comes through particularly strongly in the manifestos so we will need to continue to lobby for this investment after the election.

The Conservative party has committed to developing new roles and creating a diverse set of potential career paths for the NHS workforce. This commitment almost certainly reflects the ongoing development of nursing

associate, support worker and advanced practice roles, so we might expect to see continued focus on these policies if there is a new Conservative government. The Conservatives have also reaffirmed their commitment to helping healthcare assistants become nurses through the degree apprenticeship route.

Workforce investment is of course influenced by overall levels of funding. All three of the main parties in England have committed to increasing NHS spending, with Labour and the Liberal Democrats pledging the greatest investment funded through increases in taxation. The Liberal Democrats would also like to see the hypothecation of health and care taxation.

## **International**

Universities UK and other bodies are lobbying hard to protect UK students' access to the Erasmus+ programme. We know that some nursing, midwifery and AHP students benefit from this scheme and that others study abroad as part of a university-based programme. Student mobility is threatened by the UK's departure from the EU, though Labour and the Liberal Democrats would seek to ensure that Britain remains part of the Erasmus scheme.

Controversially, the Conservatives have decided to include overseas students in overall immigration figures. This will be reflected in tougher student visa requirements and stricter requirements for students wishing to stay in the UK after graduation. In contrast, the Liberal Democrats and Labour have committed to treating overseas students as temporary visitors.

## **Teaching and learning**

The parties have radically different schools' policies but there is strong emphasis on widening participation, further and technical education running through all the manifestos. These policies will impact our members over the coming parliament. There is a clear link to the growth of apprenticeships policies and the creation of new career pathways for health and social care staff.

Labour for example would introduce free, lifelong education in FE colleges. The Conservative party has said it would replace existing technical qualifications with new qualifications, known as T-levels, including in health subjects. It has committed to establishing new institutes of technology linked to universities in every major city to provide courses at degree level and above, specialising in technical disciplines and higher-level apprenticeships. These institutes would have access to public funding for research and loans and grants for students.

## Research

The Council has called for the next Government to commit to protecting current levels of investment in research and development funding, health research and the Global Challenges Fund. All of the main parties have included commitments to research spending in their manifestos. The Labour party would increase spending on research and development to 3% of GDP by 2030 while the Conservatives would increase research investment to 2.4% of GDP by 2027 with a longer term goal of 3%. The Liberal Democrats are committed to an annual inflationary increase in science funding. They have also stated that they want to ensure that a fair proportion of all public funding for medical research is focused on research into mental ill-health.

The Council has asked the next Government to maintain full UK access to and influence over EU research and innovation programmes. Labour has committed to ensuring that the UK maintains a leading research role by seeking to stay part of Horizon 2020 and welcoming research staff to the UK. The Liberal Democrats also say they would fight to retain access to Horizon 2020 and Marie Skłodowska-Curie funds as well as campaigning against any reduction in investment in UK universities, and for universities' rights to apply for EU funds on equal terms. The Conservatives have not committed explicitly to retaining access to EU research funding but have restated their wish to continue to collaborate with the EU on science and innovation.

## Regulation

The Conservatives have pledged to “legislate to reform and rationalise the current outdated system of professional regulation of healthcare professions, based on the advice of the professional regulators”. This is not a new policy but it would have huge implications over time for our members and the professionals they educate.

The Conservatives are not planning further regulatory changes to the higher education sector, though universities wishing to charge maximum tuition fees would be expected to be involved in academy sponsorship or the founding of free schools.

Labour has plans to create a new healthcare regulator to oversee quality, safety and excellence.

## Funding for universities and student support

Labour has committed to abolishing university tuition fees for all students. This is obviously a policy with far-reaching implications and little additional detail. It is unclear for example what this might mean over time for student

number caps or overall funding levels. The Liberal Democrats have proposed a review of higher education finance “to consider any necessary reforms, in the light of the latest evidence of the impact of the existing financing system on access, participation and quality”.

Labour has pledged to reintroduce bursaries for health-related degrees and maintenance grants for university students. The Liberal Democrats have also said that they would ‘reinstate student nurse bursaries’ as well as university maintenance grants for the poorest students.

The Liberal Democrats have committed to ruling out student loan book privatisation and future changes to repayment conditions.

The SNP has guaranteed the continuation of tuition free university education in Scotland and the ‘non-repayable nursing and midwifery student bursary ‘

### **What are we doing?**

The Council has published its own election manifesto ‘[Towards sustainability: ensuring the future healthcare workforce](#)’ This sets out three priority areas: investing in the graduate workforce, building on the expertise and experience of existing staff and increasing innovation and research capacity. We have shared this with all the main parties and organisations with shared interests.

The Council will continue to monitor election announcements and lobby on behalf of our members. Once the results of the election are known, the Council is committed to working with the new government.