

Conference 2014

Crossbow

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A conservative Manifesto for the Party and the Nation

*The blueprint for
restoring conservative
values to Britain and the
Conservative Party*

Featuring contributions from:

The
BOW
GROUP

Boris Johnson
Stephen Hammond MP
Jeremy Lefroy MP

Dominic Grieve MP
Fiona Bruce MP
David Rutley MP

About the Bow Group

The Bow Group is the United Kingdom's oldest conservative think tank. Founded in 1951, the Bow Group exists to publish the research of its members, stimulate policy debate through an events programme and to provide an intellectual home to conservatives in the United Kingdom. Although firmly housed in the Conservative Party family, the Bow Group does not take a corporate view and it represents all strands of conservative opinion.

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The Bow Group



Chairman's message

Ben Harris-Quinney

Party Conference season should be a crucial, indispensable time in the British political calendar for the nation's most prominent political movements to come together, listen to each other and the nation, remember core principles and make a pitch for better government.

The Bow Group won't be taking part in Conservative Party Conference this year, because after a long campaign for greater freedom and democracy in the Conservative Party and at its Conference, we feel that a genuine forum for conservatism and for the freedom and democracy of Conservative Party members remains absent from the event, in favour of a corporate venue for press and lobbyists.

We won't be the only absentees who have drawn similar conclusion as to the value and salience of the modern Conservative Party conference. Many MPs, MEPs, Lords and members will also be noticeably absent, and that must give the Party and broader conservative movement pause for concern and review.

We hope to return next year, under a Conservative government, to an engage with a reformed Party and a reformed Conference. That is why we have produced our vision and blueprint for a conservative party, and a conservative Britain: A conservative Manifesto.

Even under the weak leadership of Ed Miliband, the current polls reflect that before conservatives can win elections, we must win arguments, and to do so we must have the courage of our own convictions.

As at the home for intellectual conservatism, the Bow Group has campaigned consistently for an end to the consensus politics of the Third Way that defined the Blair years.

Now it is clear that the era of centrism is passing, demonstrated by the rise of UKIP and the SNP, and the return of the recently absent conviction politician.

This has led to significant and often uncomfortable shifts on the right in Britain, where conservatism now spans two major parties, with large elements of the debate taking place outside of either.

We embrace this change as necessary, and will adapt to it without any concession of the principles of conservatism that the Bow Group was founded to defend and promote. With the right vision and manifesto for the Party and nation, the Conservatives can do the same.

Editor's message

Peter Smith

Conservative thought is found in unlikely places. Take, for instance, those street gurus, Run DMC, and their hip-hop classic, *It's Like That*:

*People in the world try to make ends meet
You try to ride car, train, bus or feet
I said, "You got to work hard to want to compete
It's like that and that's the way it is, huh"*

*You should've gone to school, you could've learned a trade
But you laid in the bed where the bums have laid
Now all the time you're crying that you're underpaid
It's like that and that's the way it is, huh*

*One thing I know is that life is short
So listen up homeboy, give this a thought
The next time someone's teaching why don't you get taught?
It's like that and that's the way it is*

*If you really think about it times aren't that bad
The one that stretches for success will make you glad
Stop playing, start praying, you won't be sad
It's like that and that's the way it is, huh*

*When you feel you fail, sometimes it hurts
For a meaning in life is why you search
Take the boys on the train, drive to school on the church
It's like that and that's the way it is*

Study hard, work harder, have faith, be entrepreneurial and risk failure: these are essential values for modern conservatives. As the country hurtles towards the 2015 General Election, the question will be asked time and time again, by political pundits on the airwaves and potential electors on the doorsteps. What do Conservatives believe in? It is essential that the Conservative Party has an offering presented to the electorate that it is clear, honest, and thoughtful. Only then

will Conservative policies, like the rap of Run DMC, strike a chord with the British people.

It is often remarked that, across many countries, conservatives do not win elections because they are popular. They win because they are respected. That respect is a function of clarity, honesty and thought, but also consistency. Policy ideas should be launched to the public and media only after due consultation and debate, to avoid the embarrassment

of u-turns and abandonment. There must be uniformity in presentation by Ministers and MPs, candidates and canvassers alike. Principles are the glue that binds concept and delivery together.

We at the Bow Group have watched with bewilderment and horror as the leadership of the Conservative Party has turned away from key conservative principles. What follows is, in the main, not a detailed and costed manifesto for 2015, but a set of principles and ideas from a group of economic and social conservatives. Freedom features heavily: Boris Johnson calls for cities to be set free, David Ruffley seeks support for our entrepreneurs, and Philip Booth wants government to stop saddling future generations with debt. Benedict Rogers argues for religious freedom, Robert Peal for free schools, Laura Perrins for families free from state interference.

Yet rather than being head-banging Right-wingers, our contributors' sense of capitalism is tempered by concern and respect for the bases of our society.

Research Secretary's Update

Luke Springthorpe

The Bow Group have had a busy year on the research front, and a summary of some (but not all) of our work follows below. Following our most recent AGM, I am pleased that we now also have an excellent team of Research Fellows to develop our output over the next year. As ever, I encourage anyone who would like to write a paper to get in touch via research@bowgroup.org.

Adam Memon opposes corporatism, Jeremy Lefroy wants social stability, Patricia Morgan argues for transferable tax allowances to support marriage, Jane Kelly links social mobility to schooling, and Fiona Bruce reminds us all of the true conservative respect for the inviolable dignity of the human person. Some policy proposals are quite specific, of course: I hope you enjoy reading Dominic Grieve on human rights, David Green on policing, Andrew Lilico on the Union, Stephen Hammond on transport, and Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram. Ben Balliger focuses on the civil service, Rupert Beale and Myles Harris on health, Francis Hallinan on immigration, Rory Broomfield on Europe, Francis Davis and Henry Nelles on local government, Tony Lodge on energy, and Miles Windsor on Party membership. And Ben Harris-Quinney and Nabil Najjar set out their views on foreign policy and defence.

We hope these texts stimulate and antagonise, and shape the Conservative Manifesto for 2015. *Pace* Run DMC but it's like this, and this is the way it should be.

Papers

Privatisation of the Royal Mail

An exploration of the arguments for and against privatisation, this paper concluded that amendment and delay to the Privatisation Bill were necessary to encourage public and industry support, while realising full value for the taxpayer.

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Reflections on the revolution in Ukraine

This report looked at the developing situation in Ukraine. It examined social contract theory to highlight similarities, in some of aspects of social behaviour, between people in contemporary Kiev and Revolutionary France

The badger cull

In addition to our previous calls for vaccination of badgers and the rolling-out of a cattle vaccine, we argued for the establishment of an independent panel for bovine TB policy making. Given the estimated cost of £4,121 for culling a single badger, this paper opposed the cull on the grounds of its wild and varying expense.

US & UK Policy regarding terrorism in Nigeria

A report that cast new light on the role the US has played in the rise of Boko Haram in West Africa by delaying their designation of Boko Haram as a terrorist organisation. It was a stark warning on the future of Africa's largest economy, and the economic and political stability of West Africa.

The regulatory outlook for Crowdfunding

With equity crowd funding platforms to be regulated from April 1st 2014, this paper considered the strengths and weaknesses of this relatively new source of funding for businesses. It also considered the pitfalls of regulating such funding.

The case against quotas for female executive appointments

This paper argued that imposing quotas for female boardroom appointments would be detrimental not only to women but also to businesses. Its authors called for the UK to take all

steps possible at the European Council, with the help of allies, to block any attempt to make the composition of privately-run businesses boardrooms a competence of the European Union. It recommended that the Prime Minister issued a strong statement that left the UK's allies on the European Council in no doubt about the UK's resolve in resisting further European intervention in the governance of British companies.

The case against raising the UK minimum wage

The authors warned that a rise in the minimum wage would be unnecessarily populist, and that the economic rationale in any rise would be doubtful given the sluggish rise in productivity. The report counselled that the Conservatives focus on proper economic achievements rather than gimmicks which may only potentially have electoral success.

Victoria Cross campaign

Recently, one of our papers published back in 2012 achieved a big success. The paper challenged the Government to provide an adequate system to record, preserve and maintain the graves and memorials of Victoria Cross and high medal recipients who have served to great distinction in the British Armed Forces throughout the history of the United Kingdom. Recently, it was agreed that funding would be given for the preservation of the war graves.

Urban devo-max

*Free our cities to grow and prosper, cries **Boris Johnson***

Phewee. The people of Scotland have done the right thing – and by some margin. They have voted to keep Britain, to keep the Union, and to stay part of a great and United Kingdom whose best days are yet to come. With a 10.6 per cent lead for the Unionist cause, I believe the question has been settled for our generation and with luck for our lifetimes. And yet the story is not over – because the leaders of all parties are now committed to devolving even more powers and responsibilities from Whitehall to Scotland. This will be by no means easy.

The reality is that there is already a fundamental unfairness in the way England is treated under the devolutionary settlement. And if we are to go any further with devolution north of the border, that unfairness must be sorted out. David Cameron has rightly called for English votes for English laws, and I am delighted to say he has simultaneously recognised the attractions of empowering the great cities of Britain.

This is vitally important. It is one thing to solve the West Lothian question – by making sure that Scottish MPs don't vote on questions that only affect England. We need to go further. Any serious devolutionary settlement for Scotland simply must reflect the need for greater fiscal autonomy for England, and in particular for London and England's eight core cities – Birmingham, Bristol,

Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.

I support the call for urgent financial devolution in England, which formed the backbone of Professor Tony Travers' work with the London Finance Commission, whose conclusions were published in 2013.

The idea in a nutshell is to give city governments – at all levels, boroughs and mayoralties – more responsibility for raising locally some of the tax money they spend locally. This would encourage those politicians to go for policies that encourage economic activity; it would encourage them to be prudent (and should therefore help Conservatives get elected); and if handled right it would lead to higher tax yields for the Treasury.

We in London are seeing a population explosion bigger than any in our lifetimes, with consequent heavy demands on our infrastructure. And yet, like all great English cities, the capital has been chronically unable to plan, to borrow, and to make the long-term investments we need – being forced instead to go intermittently to Whitehall to beg for penny packets of funding. This system is wasteful, unpredictable and unsustainable.

What we need instead is more stability and certainty and so what we are asking for is a very modest and trivial change –

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the devolution of 5 property taxes. You can see how modest it is when I say that in the case of London it would mean increasing the proportion of tax money spent that is actually raised locally from 5 per cent to 12 per cent.

You can see how trivial that is when you consider that in New York the city authorities at one level or another have control of 50 per cent of taxation, and in Tokyo it is up at 70 per cent. Compared to our global competitors, English cities are treated like children, and that needs to change.

As Tony Travers has shown, the devolution of property taxes would be revenue neutral, since the sums retained by the cities would be deducted from the central government grant to the city involved. There would be protections for businesses and householders so that if there were to be any changes to the rates, they would be equitable and agreed by city government at all levels.

And in any event local politicians would have a strong incentive not to mulct

businesses or properties but to go for policies that will encourage growth. And in the case of London that extra growth will allow the city to export even more of its tax yield to the rest of the country so it's win-win for all, and I believe the logic is unimpeachable.

I will not pretend that this is a revolutionary cause, or that you will see people mounting the barricades with the cry of "What do we want?", "The revolution of the suite of five property taxes!", "When do we want it?", "Now!"

But I think it ought to be so narcoleptically uncontroversial as to become the settled wisdom of everyone who believes in localism and devolution and trusting people to run their lives. What's good for Scotland should surely be good for England too.

Boris Johnson is Mayor of London and Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Uxbridge and South Ruislip



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Bow Group - the oldest
thinktank in the UK - visit:
<http://www.bowgroup.org/content/join>

It's not just the economy, stupid

Jeremy Lefroy on ways the next Conservative government can improve social stability

Whoever is in 10 Downing Street after the General Election, the Prime Minister will face a situation almost as tough as that which confronted David Cameron in 2010.

Despite the considerable economic achievements achieved by the people of the UK under the Coalition Government - record numbers of people in work, unemployment cut by more than 400,000 in the past year alone, and the deficit down from 10% of GDP in 2010 to 5.3% in 2014 (OECD figures) - he (for barring unforeseen circumstances, it will be he) will need to continue to keep a tight lid on public expenditure in the next parliament.

Yet, with a growing economy, people will be less understanding of austerity. They will ask why the government is not reversing at least some of the cuts in real public expenditure that were forced on it by the great recession, let alone continuing to make further cuts.

Listening to my constituents, I am clear that most do not seek ever-increasing prosperity. What they desire above all is stability in an uncertain world. That takes concrete forms like knowing that your income will meet your basic needs and a few extras, such as a holiday, believing that our health service will give you safe care of a high quality when you or your loved ones need it, and trusting in the standard of education

which your children and grandchildren receive in our schools and colleges.

But stability is also more than that. It is a function of trust in the security and nature of our country, as a place where we are protected from criminals and terrorists who wish to harm us or destroy our social fabric and way of life. Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Party leader and Prime Minister in the early 1930's, understood this. Faced with the great depression and the rise of extremism in Europe, he campaigned under the slogan, 'Baldwin's security mixture'.

Stability is, of course, not only the responsibility of government and the state. There are several ways in which as citizens we can contribute to social stability.

Firstly, we need to accept that social stability involves giving as well as taking. It is wrong to reap the benefits of a stable, peaceful society and yet not contribute your fair share of the taxes which underpin it. Tax is not a necessary evil, as some would have you believe. When it is charged and collected fairly, it is part of what builds a civilised and stable society.

Secondly, we all - not only the government - must confront those who would seek to use our open society in order to undermine it, sowing instability

which affects everyone. When Karl Popper wrote his great work, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, the enemies he had in mind were communists. Today we face other extremists, racists and religious terrorists among them, who want to use our freedom to impose their hate filled ideologies on us all.

Thirdly, we can recognise the central role which marriage and family life play in creating and underpinning stability. It is not simply that the economic cost of family breakdown - estimated by the Centre for Social Justice at £40bn pa in public expenditure alone - consumes resources which could be used much more productively. It is the strength which stable family life and marriage adds to our communities and society.

Finally, we can both recognise and support those who do so much for our country and its stability, but whom we too often take for granted. They are carers and volunteers, looking after loved ones and friends, giving up their time to teach our children new skills and so much else.

Economic stability is much more fragile than social stability. When the economy broke down in 2008, society did not fall apart. However social stability, once destroyed, is much harder to restore; and it takes the economy down with it. So a political party which wishes to govern in the interests of the nation needs to take social stability very seriously.

That is why I wish to see the Conservative Party put both economic

and social stability at the heart of its election manifesto. That means making it quite clear that all will contribute according to their means - "to whom much is given, from them much will be expected." It means having no truck with those who try to use our freedoms to spread their poison.

Above all it means speaking up and acting for the huge numbers in our country who do not ask what the state can do for them, but quietly and responsibly give of themselves for others.

Jeremy Lefroy is Member of Parliament for Stafford

The Bow Group is always looking for contributors who share our conservative ideals.

If you are interested in writing for *Crossbow*, or producing a research paper under our banner, please contact:
research@bowgroup.org

UnConventional views

Dominic Grieve on why the present human rights' framework should be reformed, not binned

As I write this article, we are twenty four hours from the Scottish referendum with its profound consequences for our constitutional future. Whatever the outcome, it is certain that the coming months and years are going to see a growing debate over fundamental issues of our governance.

It has also been clear for some time that one of those issues within the Conservative Party concerns human rights. In a political tradition that has no difficulty celebrating human rights enshrined in Magna Carta, habeas corpus and the Bill of Rights, we are mired in doubt as to the benefits of the ECHR and the Human Rights Act. Both are attacked as giving rights to the so-called undeserving and fettering the state's freedom of action to protect its citizens. Our obligation in international law to implement decisions of the Strasbourg court is criticised for ignoring the will of Parliament, where it clashes with previously enacted legislation, such as that denying convicted and sentenced prisoners the vote.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Strasbourg court has many problems. It was set up to deal with a small number of cases brought between sovereign states. But it has evolved into a final court of appeal for individuals who believe their Convention rights have been violated. With the adherence of previously totalitarian Eastern European states, aspiring to freedom

and democracy, it struggles to meet the demand and the quality of its judges has been questioned. It has also become susceptible to losing sight of the 'margin of appreciation', that should ensure that member states should have latitude in the way the Convention is interpreted in their own courts. The court's decision on prisoner voting, which many including myself believe was mistaken, illustrates this drive to unnecessary micro management of national practises.

But the suggestion that we should therefore leave the Convention or seek to restrict its scope, in flagrant breach of our international obligations will not solve the problem.

Firstly it undermines our country's standing in promoting human rights worldwide, something that we have properly made a centrepiece of our foreign policy. Why should other member states of the Council of Europe implement Strasbourg court judgments (which they generally do) if we do not? What message do we send to countries whose human rights we wish to improve when we are bent on undermining the international convention most respected in promoting them?

A full withdrawal or a deliberate policy on non-implementation of court decisions would also be very dangerous in exposing us to the risk of the European Court in Luxembourg stepping in to fill any gap by invoking the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It is

settled UK policy to restrict the application of the principles of the Charter as far as possible. But if the UK does not meet Convention standards it is likely to be viewed as being in breach of its EU treaty obligations, thus presenting an open invitation to The Luxembourg Court to get involved. Unlike the European Court of Human Rights, judgements of the European Court of Justice have direct effect. Unless we are leaving the EU, we could find ourselves more restricted than before.

It has furthermore been made clear within the Conservative Party that any replacement to the Human Rights Act in the form of a British Bill of Rights must include the rights protected by the Convention. This is hardly surprising as the rights themselves are principles shared by all right thinking people. But this means that our own Supreme Court will continue to interpret the Convention. While I entirely support the principle that our Supreme Court should not be fettered to Strasbourg jurisprudence, the reality is that in the vast majority of issues its approach will lead to very similar outcomes and there will still be instances in which government ministers and the public do not approve of the result. We will thus have taken a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Finally, whilst withdrawal from the Convention is perfectly possible legally, cherry picking the decisions of the court is not, unless we abandon every principle of international law and behave in an anarchic fashion. These principles are so important that observing our international legal obligations is enshrined in the ministerial code issued by the Prime

Minister, to be observed by all public servants. I find it impossible to see how any Law Officer could sign off such a policy change.

There is an alternative way forward. Recent decisions by the Court of Human Rights in cases concerning the ban on political advertising in Britain and the permitted use of hearsay in our courts have shown a much greater responsiveness to the reasoned judgments of our own courts where areas of disagreement have arisen and led to a productive dialogue. Our own courts have become alive to the issue and have been willing to disagree with the Strasbourg court where they thought it right so to do. The programme of reforming the court, in which I participated with Ken Clarke and which led to the Brighton Declaration in 2012, should generate further positive change in giving greater latitude to the interpretation of the Convention by our own courts. We would have been able to achieve more if it had not been for the anxiety, felt by some of our key partners in Scandinavia and elsewhere, that the UK might be seeking to undermine rather than reform the ECHR.

We pride ourselves rightly with our international engagement to try to create a better world. The ECHR is, along with the other thirteen thousand treaties which we have entered into since 1815, designed to further that process. It should not be lightly abandoned.

The Right Honourable Dominic Grieve QC is Member of Parliament for Beaconsfield and was Attorney-General, 2010 to 2014

The Unionist way forward

*Does the Conservative Party want to be a party for the English or a party for the Union, asks **Andrew Lilico***

So, the Unionists won in the Scottish referendum. In the end it wasn't even close. But, during the campaign, the Prime Minister and others agreed a rapid timetable for additional devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament and Executive, followed immediately after victory with the announcement by the Prime Minister that, in tandem, there would be a broader set of constitutional reforms to tackle the notorious 'West Lothian Question'.

In these new reforms, the Conservative Party must choose whether it is fundamentally a Unionist party or an English Nationalist party.

The English Nationalist view would be that England is a country like Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland, and that, if the other countries of the United Kingdom are to have devolved powers, England must have them too.

The Unionist position, by contrast, ranks the unity and integrity of the United Kingdom above the unity and integrity of any individual component of the United Kingdom. In my view, the Unionist position must have four elements.

The rejection of dominance. The Unionist, regarding Britain as one entity, must reject the idea that any region should dominate in influence or affluence.

The rejection of federalism. We should conceive of whatever new arrangement arises for the Union as a form of regional governance. There is no passing of fundamental sovereignty to 'states' or 'statelets' of the Union. Sovereignty must remain with the Crown in Parliament.

The rejection of permanence. Like any form of non-sovereign local government, future reforms might change things very considerably, re-organising boundaries or relevant subdivisions. And responsibility for how such governance works must remain with the Crown-in-Parliament.

The 'if one suffers, we all suffer' principle. In my view, assemblies and 'parliaments' are manifestly a bad form of government. But as a Unionist, my belief is that we must have common forms of governance throughout the Union. So if two components of England-and-Wales, say, are going to have assemblies (Wales and London), then we all must suffer that way of doing things for a while.

Bearing these principles in mind, it appears to me that the Unionist way forward must be as follows.

We should have, throughout England-and-Wales, a series of regional and city assemblies that is each of a similar population scale to those in Wales, Scotland and London, i.e. perhaps between 4 and 8 million persons each. That means somewhere between 6 and 12 additional regional assemblies.

These assemblies should have powers to set income taxes in particular, along with a range of other taxes such as stamp duty on house purchases, social insurance (a regionally-based form of National Insurance, probably taking the form of a Health Insurance, a Pension Contribution, an Unemployment Insurance, Sickness Insurance, and so on). They should have powers to spend money on health, education, the police, and other matters. They should have no powers to raise debt. They may have local powers to set certain civil law matters and relating to corporate taxes on business activities. They should receive VAT revenues though the levels would be set nationally (see below).

There should be a Parliament in Westminster, almost identical to that now. That Parliament would have responsibility for defence, cross-regional policing, trade, trans-regional transport networks, trans-regional energy networks, interaction with international bodies such as the EU, criminal laws, civil laws such as they related to cross-regional or national activities, foreign policy, and other such matters.

The Westminster Parliament would fund its activities and departments via taxes on transport (e.g. fuel duty, air passenger duty), excise duties, tariff income, duties on corporate activities that were national in nature, royalties on Crown claims such as minerals (e.g. oil revenues), and certain other activities that were national or cross-regional in nature. The Westminster Parliament would also be responsible for all debt-raising.

In addition to the above, the Westminster Parliament would set, each year,

a portion of each region's GDP that it would have to set aside in taxes, to be placed into a common pot. The Westminster Parliament would then consider whether to supplement that pot via debt-raising or repay debt using some of the funds in that pot (along with servicing debt from Westminster's other revenue streams). The revised pot, after new debt-raising and debt repayment, would then be allocated by the Westminster Parliament to the regional assemblies as into-region transfers. That should not be done via any automatic formula. There should instead be an explicit vote each year on the allocation of regional funds.

Westminster should be responsible for the funding of (or securing from the private sector or otherwise of funds for) inter-regional or national transport networks (e.g. motorways, railways, airports). Westminster should have powers to engage in other forms of discretionary capital projects within particular regions.

Such an arrangement could be made to work, whilst retaining the essential character of Westminster politics and the integrity of the Union. It would neuter some of the centrifugal forces created by Labour's half-baked devolution — forces that would be greatly amplified by either an English Parliament or a English MPs Grand Committee on English Laws. No-one would assume that a North East Assembly leader were the 'Prime Minister' of a country. They would therefore quickly cease to ascribe the same significance to the officers of the Welsh Assembly and government. In due course, they might even undermine some of the sense of difference of the

Scottish arrangements (though of course Scotland was different – with its own laws and Crown – even before devolution, so there should be no aspiration to destroy, altogether, the sense that Scotland is a country unto itself – it always has been).

The above sketch seems to me to be the Unionist path. The Conservative Party now faces the great dilemma: does it want, fundamentally, to be a party for the English or a party for the Union?

Andrew Lilico is Executive Director and Principal of Europe Economics

Back our entrepreneurs

In different ways, self-employment works for us all, explains David Rutley

Self-employment continues to surge and the Government is putting its weight behind our growing army of entrepreneurs. Some 4.6 million Britons are now self-employed – roughly 15%, or more than one in seven of all those in employment. At the start of the 21st century, less than 12% worked for themselves. We need to be clear that this change is good news. As Esther McVey, the Employment Minister, said recently, “If you have this seed, this idea, this creativity, you want to set up a business, then that is what you should do and we as a Conservative Party...are going to support and liberate people, to give people as many opportunities to succeed as possible, without being prescriptive.”

The message is compelling: our business in government is not to defend privilege, but to spread opportunity. To do this, and achieve what John Major called the “classless society”, we need to ensure that our economy is open to new entrants, not a closed shop of long-established firms. We must keep finding new ways to unleash the freedom to

innovate, enable competition and celebrate enterprise. We need also to encourage the increasing number of self-employed to aspire to take the next step and become employers, or take on apprentices. Opportunity Britain, for all.

To spread opportunity, we need more people – from all backgrounds – to take on the roles of entrepreneur and employer. Where people are new to them – where there is no family history of business, or no network of contacts and friends who have been there, done that – we need to break down the tangible and cultural barriers to starting up alone. First-time entrepreneurs and first-time employers should be as important to modern Conservatives as first-time homeowners and first-time shareholders continue to be in a more socially mobile Britain.

There are always warnings from the unions and others that self-employed jobs are not ‘proper’ jobs, or that people have been pushed into it part-time as a last resort rather than pulled into it full-time by its attractions. The Left has

historically had an ideological dislike of self-employment: it reduces dependency on the state, it allows people to follow their own way, it blurs the ‘them and us’ of their class-conflict politics. Yet the Royal Society of Arts has recently found that what they call the “self-employment revolution” is fired by the benefits of being self-employed: the flexibility, the pursuit of your own dreams, the dignity and freedom.

Of course, self-employment is not right for everyone. But, importantly, it is the new entrepreneurs, the small-scale self-employed who are more likely than established companies to take on workers from the ranks of the unemployed, the excluded or non-active – those who often find the formalised application processes, let alone set working practices, of established firms rather difficult to adapt to. Furthermore, people who get jobs with small firms often learn, from their hands-on experience there, to set up their own small firm after a few years’ experience. It is a virtuous circle of the upwardly mobile entrepreneurs helping new entrants into the labour market and then into entrepreneurialism itself. 74% of those becoming self-employed with employees come from the self-employed who previously had no employees – a further 13% comes from employees who had previously been working in micro-businesses.

It is right, then, that the Treasury has focused help on smaller enterprises in the current recovery. The New Enterprise Allowance, for example, actively encourages the unemployed to start up as entrepreneurs, while the

£2,000 National Insurance Employment Allowance aims to encourage the smallest firms to take on their first employee.

Those who would seek to regulate existing businesses should always think about the consequences on those businesses yet-to-exist, as this Government is doing. Whitehall communication with the self-employed should make every effort to emphasize the assistance available to businesses, not act as a psychological ‘closed door’ to exploring the options for taking on employees. Lord Young powerfully stated that “psychological barriers stifle ambition.” Creating an aspiration nation means ensuring that the road to running your own business is a clearly-signposted fast lane, not Labour’s minefield of forms, box ticking and regulations.

Plan A has worked to bring back jobs and growth, and we are moving on to reach our long-term economic potential. As a Party, we are showing that we are committed to achieving our social potential too. By energising and enabling the self-employed, this Government – and future Conservative Governments – can spread opportunity across the country and revitalise Britain’s great spirit of enterprise, producing jobs and growth. Self-employment may not be right for everyone, but it works for us all.

David Rutley is Member of Parliament for Macclesfield

Stop spending the kids' inheritance

We are running out of our children's money, says Philip Booth. The Conservatives must stop the haemorrhage now

Perhaps the most crucial issue we face at the next election is that of 'inter-generational justice'. Left-leaning campaigners often argue against supposed cuts in the welfare state on the grounds of 'social justice'. However, the same people are entirely unwilling to acknowledge the problem of funding welfare by imposing unsustainable burdens on the next generation. Unless the whole welfare state is put on a sustainable footing, the current squeeze will be nothing like the problems we will face in the next 50 years.

Our post-war social security systems have been constructed so that each generation promises itself benefits that will be paid for by the taxes of the following working generation. Unfortunately, low birth rates and increasing longevity can make these systems unsustainable. Not only is there no self-correcting mechanism within so-called 'pay-as-you-go' social security systems, the problems can be self-reinforcing. As the proportion of older voters grows, it becomes more and more difficult politically to scale back benefits. So we see, for example, the Conservative Party trying to trim benefits paid to younger people whilst promising to increase state pensions in line with the higher of wage increases, price increases and 2.5 per cent per annum – a completely absurd commitment.

This problem of inter-generational commitments is not confined to pensions. The vast majority of health expenditures occur at the end of life. Under a different system of financing we could save – or insure – during our working lives to meet some of these expenditures in later life. In our current system, we just hope that there will be enough taxpayers to finance the healthcare needs of the elderly.

The Left continually use a narrative based on the promotion of social justice to promote their ideas. Indeed, they often seem to use the term to close down debate altogether and to imply that any policy is necessarily wrong if it directly harms the poor, even if the wider effects are positive. However, the problem of inter-generational injustice that is being faced by current developed democracies transcends that of any reasonable definition of 'social justice' within generations.

If you project forward the UK's public finances based on realistic assumptions, the results are alarming. The government's own figures – produced by the Office for Budget Responsibility – suggest that government debt could balloon to 200 per cent of national income at current tax rates and given current spending plans. The IEA recently published a book called *The Government Debt Iceberg*. The reason for the title is that implicit government debt

arising from future pensions and healthcare commitments is around six times the level of the explicit government debt with which George Osborne is wrestling – roughly the same proportions as the above- and below-water parts of an iceberg.

The research in this book showed that, in order for the government's books to be balanced in 50 years' time, spending on all welfare programmes (health, pensions and transfers to families of working age) would have to be cut by around a half. Alternatively, the government would have to raise tax revenues by about one third. These changes would have to be implemented now, for the longer they are deferred the bigger the challenge to balance the books becomes.

This is the challenge for the next generation. Either the next government makes radical reforms to the welfare state or the next two generations of taxpayers will be landed with bills they cannot pay.

It was not long ago that we had a Conservative Party that had the intellectual imagination to tackle these problems. In both the 1997 and 2001 elections, the Party proposed a radical overhaul of pensions that would have replaced state provision by proper funded provision along the lines of that in more fiscally responsibly countries such as Australia. Similar radical thinking needs to be undertaken in the sphere of healthcare too.

Unfortunately, this government has not only failed to tackle the deficit it inherited, it has also piled up more burdens for future generations. Its public sector pension reforms have been weak; the Government has increased the state pension in various ways; and it has prevented people from opting out of part of the state pension and making their own funded provision instead.

We need politicians who will stand up for the young; we need politicians who will stand against inter-generational injustice. Mrs. Thatcher once commented that the problem of socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money. Modern governments have resolved this problem by adding future generations to their definition of 'other people'. The biggest challenge of modern politics is to radically reform the welfare state and return to an economy based on inter-generational justice whereby people cannot promise themselves pensions and healthcare provision unless they are prepared to fund those benefits themselves.

Philip Booth is Editorial and Programme Director at the Institute of Economic Affairs, and Professor of Insurance and Risk Management, Cass Business School, City University

True capitalism will set us free

Reducing the tax burden on businesses and families is essential for liberty to flourish, argues Adam Memon

In recent years, capitalism seems to have lost its way. At times it has fought valiantly against the resurgent power of the Leviathan state but far too often it has been seduced by the allure of corporatism and become locked in the toxic embrace of cartelisation and bail-out addiction. So capitalism is in urgent need of rescue, one of the key messages of the Margaret Thatcher Conference on Liberty held this June by the Centre for Policy Studies.

As Professor Deidre McCloskey so rightly pointed out, "it is not the accumulation of capital in itself which is the key to prosperity, but innovation." Proponents of a free market economy must stress the fact that capitalism is not simply the mechanism which enables big business to earn huge profits. However, it is the system which best promotes liberty in all its forms, which drives higher prosperity and which develops new technologies to make us safer, healthier and more comfortable.

Yet capitalists have comprehensively failed effectively to convey this message. It is not difficult to see why. Massive bank bail-outs, whilst necessary as a short term measure to prevent economic collapse, have led to one of the biggest transfers of wealth from the poor to the rich in human history. The complexity of the tax system gives the impression that it is rigged in favour of

those already with power and wealth. Too many industries have become dominated by big, bulky businesses, some of which work fine but too many of which are anti-competitive defenders of monopoly profits and privileges.

Can a family of four living on an income of £21,000 per year really be described as economically free? For their healthcare, their only choice is the NHS; private healthcare is of course far too expensive. For their children they might get lucky by finding them a good school but any option other than state education is absurd. The high cost of childcare combined with hideously high marginal tax rates means that it really doesn't make much sense for both parents to work, or at least not the hours they would want. Commuting further to where higher paying jobs might be found becomes too expensive and the concept of actually being able to buy a house is laughable.

Such a family may have every political and social freedom but it remains in many ways devoid of choice and trapped in un-free economic circumstances. For many, liberty has become the preserve of the rich.

It was in full knowledge of this fundamental relationship between wealth and liberty that Lord Saatchi unveiled his big bold tax policy at the Conference on Liberty. His aim is

nothing less than to increase the freedom of citizens and rescue popular capitalism. Lord Saatchi proposed abolishing corporation tax for all start-ups and small companies with fewer than 50 employees. This will release 90% of British companies from the burdens of a tax that hinders their growth and potential for innovation. The initial cost of the policy is believed to be around £10.5bn; however, CPS analysis shows how it could generate significant numbers of jobs, drive up investment and boost wages – empowering workers and their families.

General Petraeus argued powerfully in favour of unleashing the shale gas revolution in the UK and elsewhere. Liberalising natural resources, as the General proposed, would allow domestic companies to compete in a

globalised economy as well as cutting the cost of everyday items. This will in turn drive productivity growth and lead to more innovation. Moreover, shale gas has the potential to spread prosperity to many other parts of the UK which have been relatively untouched by the success of our great services industries. Other speakers at the Conference called for bold deregulatory moves to create new housing construction and renewed education reforms to promote educational choice and innovation.

Being free creates both the conditions and the means to achieve prosperity and being prosperous in turn makes us freer. We must rescue our capitalist system so that it does indeed make us free.

Adam Memon is the head of economic research at the Centre for Policy Studies

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Keeping Britain moving

*The Government has done well so far, says **Stephen Hammond**, but it has a long way to go to improve our transport systems*

Transport and infrastructure are largely unsung heroes when one discusses our Government's achievements. Yet, when the history is written, I suggest it will be seen as a policy area of achievement and success. This, in equal part, is due to attitude, vision, and commitment.

Why attitude? Well if one is candid, the Department for Transport (DfT) is usually seen as a departmental backwater. However it will be to George Osborne's credit that he recognises the importance of infrastructure and its maintenance, enhancement and expansion as key determinants of economic prosperity. So, unlike previous governments who took the easy option to cut both spending on both infrastructure maintenance and new capital expenditure during difficult economic times, Osborne's rejection of this easy option will raise the GDP potential of the UK economy for many years to come. Moreover, under this Government, the DfT is rightly regarded as a key economic ministry.

Since 2010, the Government has provided two spending settlements for rail, monies for road maintenance and expansion, and support for local public transport systems. New projects such as Thameslink, CrossRail, the Northern Hub, electrification of the Great Western and London Midland lines, the new A14, fifty other road enhancement schemes, six major new road projects, the Green Bus fund and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund

have all been either finished, started, developed further, or committed to. In addition, the vision of High Speed 2 is becoming reality, the roads industry will be transformed by the Highways Authority becoming a 'Gov Co' (government company) and given a longer-term funding settlement, and progress is being made on new airport capacity.

However in nine months' time, the Coalition of 2010-15 will indeed be history. A newly elected Conservative government will face a number of infrastructure and transport challenges. I have identified a few of the key ones.

Reject the 'British disease'. The usual British response to finishing a major infrastructure project is to breathe a sigh of relief and do nothing for the next five years. Equally, the usual response to maintenance and capital spending is either a short-term funding rounds or a stop/go mentality. To secure all the benefits of 2010-2015 is to recognise as soon as one major project is finished, we should move to the next. Key tests will include: Can we move seamlessly from CrossRail 1 to CrossRail 2? Will the new Highways Agency Gov Co be guaranteed a four-year funding settlement with all its attendant supply chain benefits? We must reject the 'British disease' and continue to invest, plan and expand.

Embrace the era of the customer. The failure to maintain our infrastructure for so much of the last 70 years has meant that much of the 2010-15 expenditure has been driven by engineering priority. If continued expenditure is to be supported by the public then the next few years must put the consumer at the forefront of the decision making process. For example, in the railways, ensuring Network Rail delivers more for lower unit cost will allow the cost to the consumer to be contained. There are many small projects, such as over station improvements and rolling stock, which require decisions to be taken in order to drive the quality and comfort of the journey.

Tackle the financing challenge. At the outset of this article I rightly praised maintained transport spending during difficult economic times. The next five years will also require some difficult fiscal decisions to be taken. Therefore we must make use of the private sector to realise our ambitions. It is clear that there is much institutional interest in UK infrastructure projects and it will be fairly simple to structure projects and financing structures to meet their requirements. However there are a number of other possibilities, for example allowing the private sector to compete versus Network Rail or the greater use of bond financing both project and municipal. Finally, there is the thorny issue of road pricing. As so many of us live in the "Sky" world, where we decide what we subscribe to or buy, rather than the "BBC" world, where we pay and someone else decides, I believe this can be tackled and

a politically and financially acceptable solution can be found.

Address the technology challenge. Technology is continually providing solutions to problems we thought insoluble a few years ago. A digital railway will allow more capacity and greater speed in the future. Driverless technology will allow lorry trains and ensure a better environmental performance from all motor vehicles. I could go on but the next government must commit to embrace technology, support R&D and help develop practical uses of the technological advances. In the past we have been far too reluctant to change and too slow to confront the 'we have always done it this way' mentality. Now is the time to commit ourselves to be in the technology vanguard.

Have ambition. I believe the Conservative achievement of deficit reduction and the encouragement of investment and industry is leading to a new 'can do' belief and vitality. We may have a wonderful and proud history but more important is securing a wonderful and proud future. We could build HS2 to the North more quickly, we could embrace a non-fossil fuel future for cars, we could build the London air capacity solution within seven years and we could develop more city mass transit systems. The only thing stopping us is a lack of belief or ambition.

Stephen Hammond is Member of Parliament for Wimbledon

The thin yellow line

*Withdrawing from the EU to get tough on immigration isn't dog-whistle politics, says **Francis Hallinan**. It's common sense*

Eighty million people travel through Heathrow every year, and at peak times planes land every thirty two seconds. The bigger ones can carry the equivalent population of a medieval city half way around the world in twelve hours, which, in many cases, they do. There are aircraft on designers' drawing boards which will carry one hundred passengers to Australia in four hours. Thousand seat 'flying wings' are on the horizon.

It is not just air travel that has shrunk the globe to a series of long bus rides. I can sit in my living room and carry on a conversation with a friend six thousand miles away in Melbourne as if he were sitting opposite. If I take my iPad outside as we talk, he will have the experience of walking down a London street. My friend is a consultant physician, but he could just as well be a Pakistani rice farmer and I could be a people smuggler. If I lend the farmer two thousand dollars at 20% interest I can get him into Britain in three months. He can then work for me for free in a restaurant for five years to pay it off. His family can come later when he is granted permission to stay.

This type of conversation is repeated hundreds of times a day all over Britain. A reasonable person would expect a sovereign state to react swiftly to such a state of affairs. Instead, not only have we clung to laws as relevant to modern immigration as horse licenses are to the

modern taxi trade, our politicians, in fear of the witches' curse of racism, have so weakened our borders they are practically non-existent.

There is a yellow line before every border post. If an illegal migrant can get behind that line, either by stepping across it, or coming in through a back door, say in a truck or on a boat, the entire weight of the immigration system will back any request to stay: the lawyers who serve it, the officials who maintain it, the politicians who tweak it, the journalists who lament it for being insufficiently liberal, the charities who will feed you. All you have to do once you are across the line is to demand asylum. Instantly your status changes from being an illegal asylum seeker to a legal one awaiting a decision. After that, unless you are a complete fool, or excessively honest, your chances of being deported are slim.

We cannot change our laws because we are bound by membership of the European Union with its porous 88,000 km sea and land border. There are fields along the border where you can walk into the EU with only the birds signalling the arrival of a new citizen. If you have got that far on your own, you will be sophisticated enough to know that the next thing you must do is to strike up a relationship with an EU citizen (best of all is a love affair, and heterosexual even better, as the arrival of a child absolutely

seals the deal) but any sort of close friendship will suffice. Even though it is completely illegal if you marry, immediately the welcoming blanket of human rights will descend, allowing lawyers to fight your case for years. For those lacking the emotional reserves or patience for such a struggle, although many are the informal relationships entered into once inside the UK, there are still sea containers, trucks, fake student visas and false passports.

So what can we do to stop further abuse of our borders? We must recognize the damage mass migration causes in Third World countries, depriving them of their educated middle classes and thus pushing them further into destitution. As the number of potential refugees is limitless, we have a right to set an annual quota. That right can only vest in a truly sovereign Britain, one that has left the European Union.

Following Australia's example of being extremely tough on illegal migration - action which, in the end, saves many lives - all migrants entering the country without permission would be removed immediately. Setting foot behind the yellow line would no longer grant them rights of appeal against deportations which would be swift and administrative. Britain would negotiate financial deals with countries that have in the past proved reluctant to take their citizens back.

The existing right of settled migrants to a UK passport after five years would be withdrawn, and citizenship only offered

to the second generation of the migrant's family. In the interim 'candidate' passports would be issued allowing such migrants or their family members to travel. Candidate families would not be able to contract marriages outside the UK. If a first generation migrant was found guilty of a serious crime he or she would be instantly deported. Any sentence would only be enforced if the migrant tried to re-enter Britain.

These laws would not be subject to interpretation by external bodies like the International Court of Justice at The Hague or the European Court of Human Rights. If necessary - and because we would be outside the EU and once again sovereign - we should withdraw from agreements with them.

We can either accept a world without borders, meaning within three generations Britain will no longer exist, or we can fight to preserve what is left of one of the most valuable civilizations in history. It cannot be done within the EU.

Francis Hallinan is a writer based in London

The future of policing

Merit, and not ethnicity, must be the basis on which we select police officers, argues David Green

The College of Policing, which oversees professional standards within the police force, recently declared its commitment to the idea that the legitimacy of the police depends on its ethnic composition. At present about 14 per cent of the population is from an ethnic minority, compared with only 5.2 cent for the police. Richard Bennett, assistant chief constable at the College, feared that the police would lose “a degree of legitimacy” if in future years the police had only 10 per cent black and minority ethnic representation when the national figure was 25 per cent or more. And yet, the police have never been representative of the social or ethnic breakdown of society. They have been selected because of their personal qualities. So long as that remains true, then every officer is entitled to respect, whether black or white, male or female, gay or straight. The legitimacy of the police has nothing to do with the racial composition of the force. It has to do with impartial enforcement of the law. If there were not even one member of an ethnic minority, the police would still be legitimate so long as officers owed their allegiance to impartial enforcement of the law.

The best safeguard for legitimacy is for policing to be seen as a vocation. Police officers are people who have been chosen because they deserve to wear the uniform, not because of their ethnic status. They are individuals who

deserve to be part of a profession that upholds the law without favour or affection, malice or ill-will.

Proportionate representation is sometimes justified in the name of efficiency. Some ethnic or religious groups are happier to be policed by people from their own identity group. Already some Muslims have let it be known that they do not like being given instructions by women. It's the same with some West Indian men. Some senior officers take these concerns into account.

But it can never be accepted that we are entitled to be policed only by our own kind. There are tensions in parts of England between Sikhs and Muslims. Some Muslims regard Sikhs as infidels, even lower than Christians and Jews. Are they entitled to refuse to respect a Sikh police officer? How far should we take it? Why is race the vital criterion of legitimacy? What about gender, religion and sexual orientation? What happens when ethnic status grants an officer legitimacy with one group but not with another? Is a gay man, for example, expected to grant legitimacy to a Muslim police officer who strongly disapproves of homosexuality?

The confusion started with Lord Scarman in his report on the Brixton Disorders in 1981. He upheld the importance of police independence:

“Neither politicians nor pressure-groups nor anyone else may tell the police what decisions to take or what methods to employ...The exercise of police judgement has to be as independent as the exercise of professional judgement by a doctor or a lawyer. If it is not, the way is open to manipulation and abuse of the law, whether for political or for private ends.”

So far, so good. But he also said, “There is widespread agreement that the composition of our police forces must reflect the make-up of the society they serve.”

His remark that the police should reflect the make-up of society is profoundly wrong. For one thing it never has. Moreover, no one thought it undermined legitimacy until very recently. If we ask ourselves, how we can best encourage friendly relations between groups from different cultures, the answer is never going to be by magnifying differences

and multiplying complaints. Increasingly, ethnic groups are not objective categories, but artificial communities based on grievances. We all have one identity. We are citizens who live under the same laws that apply equally to all.

Police officers should never be selected because of their ethnicity. If they pass their exams and can swear the police oath in good faith that should be good enough: ‘I do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that I will well and truly serve the Queen in the office of constable, with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and according equal respect to all people..’

The next Conservative Home Secretary must make it clear that police recruitment should be based on equality and not racial preference.

Dr David Green is the founder and Chief Executive of the think tank, Civitas

News from the Bow Group: Leading conservative thinkers join the group

One of the world's leading conservative philosophers, Roger Scruton, and one of Britain's leading historians are joining the Bow Group as senior patrons.

The Bow Group's 10 new patrons will be announced in the run up to an event in Parliament on December 18th, representing leading voices for conservatism across different walks of life.

Civilising our public servants

The Conservatives must make the Civil Service and politicians more accountable, argues Ben Balliger

Civil servants and politicians at all levels can take inordinate numbers of decisions in short periods of time. It is not in the best interests of society (and makes governance simply unworkable) if each of those decisions entails an unnecessarily detailed investigation and assessment. If society were not interested in competent decision making, we would not have a competitive democratic political process and would instead periodically rotate executive roles between philosopher kings and village idiots alike. But we are interested – in fact, very interested – in making sure that decisions are made in the right way for the right reasons, even if we do not agree with them.

Public office holders and servants are placed in positions of trust by society. We trust them to make decisions competently and for the right reasons, when they do not they breach that trust and this must have consequences.

Decisions of the state can have such devastating consequences to individuals and the wider community that it is only right, in such circumstances, to expect that such decisions are:

1. properly considered, with all the evidence that could be reasonably expected to have been gathered in an appropriate timescale;
2. made objectively, without conflicting interests;

3. made logically (what is reasonable balanced with consideration for what is best for those directly affected and the interests of the wider community);
4. made with consideration to all concerned as to the effect of the decision now and in the future; and
5. made very swiftly when people are being harmed or likely to be harmed physically and/or mentally.

You would be forgiven for thinking, after a quick survey of most areas of public life in Twenty-First Century Britain, that far reaching decisions were being made, on an all too frequent basis, without recourse to most or all of these essential ingredients to competent decision making. Decision making needs to be at its best in the state regulation of health, town planning, road planning, the armed forces, criminal sentencing, personal freedom, the protection of the environment and the protection of vulnerable people.

It is the first and last of these responsibilities where extremely poor and even perverse decision making has led to shocking failures to protect those most vulnerable, whether it be the Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust, Oldham and Rotherham Councils, or the multiple departmental failures that have been exposed in criminal cases involving celebrities and politicians accused of being paedophiles. These cases are so

appalling that it would be remiss not to question how many other horrendous failures are still ongoing (and on what scale), and how many have been successfully suppressed.

These scandals all exhibit similar failures and inappropriate motives in decision making. Motivated in the main by political expediency and self-serving interest, these cases showed a willingness to ignore the needs of those who depended on them and in some cases work against the needs of the vulnerable and all illustrate the state's failure to hold culpable individuals to account.

This is unacceptable. Individuals need to be brought to account for negligent, self-serving or malicious decision making. The failure to hold such individuals to account is not only unjust to those victims left in their wake, but allows such individuals to continue unhindered in public life making inappropriate decisions and can only encourage others to do the same. It should not then be surprising that by failing to punish these people, such or like-minded individuals will not only continue to make decisions poorly or inappropriately, but will actively seek to cover their mistakes using their authority and public funds.

To prevent such extreme failures by public servants and politicians alike in the future, I propose specific criminal legislation that, while narrowly constructed so as not to hinder everyday decision making, hangs like the Sword of Damocles over those that would

negligently or wilfully ignore those most dependent on them. The legislation should be subject to general criminal defences, such as the legitimate use or authorisation of force.

A failure to follow some or all of the five core parts of decision making outlined above could form the basis of determining whether a criminal act has been committed, whether by neglect or with intention. Punishment must not only include prison sentencing for the most serious offenders, but also permanent exclusion from ever holding public office or being employed by the state in any capacity ever again. I would even go so far as to advocate the removal of any public funded pension in extreme cases.

Such legislation would also need to protect public bodies from any claims of unfair dismissal and end the unacceptable position where people are rewarded by promotion, carry on in different public bodies or are awarded financial compensation for their unacceptable failures.

Being sorry after these terrible events is quite simply not enough.

Ben Balliger is a Conservative Councillor and Secretary of the Bow Group

Intervention - but at what cost?

The price must be right before Britain intervenes abroad, argues

Nabil Najjar

The realities of global conflict are shifting – now more so than ever – and the threats we face as a nation have become simultaneously greater in number, yet harder to define. The concept of unilateral warfare between nations has been replaced with an altogether different, unpredictable and ultimately more dangerous paradigm. Factions and organisations operating beyond the framework of national boundaries and outside the rule of law are gaining momentum at an alarming rate, and nowhere is this more noticeable than in the Middle East, an area in which the Anglo-American military machine has long held both direct and indirect military interest.

The region itself is in a state of flux, following the strategic deposition of long-established heads of state, often with the assistance of direct western involvement. The purported external attempt at democracy which started with Iraq in 2003, and came to a head during the Arab Spring of 2010-11, has yet to deliver on its promise. The strong if heavy-handed rule of Saddam Hussain, Muammar Gaddafi, Hosni Mubarak and Zine el-Abidine was swept aside and replaced with the direct support of the Western coalition. Unfortunately, though the seeds of democracy were planted, that which has come to replace the maligned leaders of old is scarcely, if at all, better than its forebear. The disparate forms of governance which have arisen lack genuine public mandates, and subsequently struggle to control the

entirety of their states. This has left the door open for dangerous factions to rear their heads, and rapidly expand into dangerous forces – the most notable of which, the Islamic State, now poses significant dangers both within and beyond the borders of the region.

The Islamic State, which has grown to fill the power vacuum in certain areas of the Arab World, poses a very real danger to Britain and its people. It is a well-funded and aggressive organisation, driven forward by ideology and a zeal for expansion – a dangerous combination. It has drawn people into its ranks from across the western world, including from Britain, and its brutality and desire to expand its dominion is cause for great concern. The USA, with support from Arab nations has already begun an air-offensive against the organisation, and the UK looks set to follow, but the reality is that, whilst this presents perhaps the most genuine case for military activity by the UK in recent years, public support for foreign intervention has waned drastically. A YouGov poll in August 2013 placed public support for military involvement in Syria at a meagre 7%, and the figure will likely be little higher in this case. How can this be explained?

Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya – the five most recent major deployments of British military force, the primary purpose of which served not the British people, but those of the ‘target’ nations. The respective outcomes of these operations vary

significantly, from much vaunted successes in Eastern Europe to misguided military activity in the Middle East which, in the eyes of many, created greater strife in the region than it resolved. Subsequent expenditure of blood and treasure for causes distant to the everyday lives of the vast majority of Britons causes significant scepticism across the population. When one casts ones gaze at the current situation in Iraq, it is a struggle to justify by any measure the British expenditure of 179 lives and £8.4bn.

The reality is that, given the political, financial and personal costs of staging asymmetric warfare against guerrilla groups, British decision-makers need to start weighing up the benefits of engagement before committing. Humanitarian gains alone can no longer justify continued action in volatile regions.

This does not, however, mean a reversion to an isolationist and laissez-faire military mind-set, but instead a conscious adherence to the terms of the Military Covenant – the government’s pledge to deploy those who volunteer to fight in defence of their nation only in situations where they stand to safeguard, enhance or defend British interests. From now on, we must look at the theatre of war as a mechanism for enhancement of British influence, and ensure that the benefits of intervention justify its costs. It means capitalising on our position of strength to demand more in return for our exertions, whether from the governments we seek to stabilise or the factions we look to support. This can come in a multitude of forms such as trade agreements, strategic military base placement, or a

lasting British presence on the ground to ensure that the civil campaigns continue once the military campaign reaches its conclusion.

An example was the British involvement in the Libyan Revolution in 2011, wherein our government spent in excess of £200m, and received little tangible return. The rapid deployment and subsequent withdrawal, all within the space of a few months created the foundations for a burgeoning democratic movement, but failed to see that process through. The promise of democracy swiftly faded and was replaced by factional discord and ultimately another conflict. Any expected benefits for Libya itself, or for those powers which supported the deposition of Gaddafi have subsequently been lost, leaving behind chaos, possible civil war, and a gaping power vacuum rapidly being filled by extremist parties. This repeating trend, as also witnessed in Iraq, should not be the legacy of allied intervention, and lessons must be learned before the inevitable need for intervention arises, wherever that may be.

As we stand on the cusp of another protracted military operation, against a dangerous but disparate opponent, let us ensure that provisions are made to secure British interests both in human and economic terms. The Iraqi central government has come to us for help, and we should answer the call – but at the same time, make sure that our actions yield tangible, long-term stability in the region, and security for Britain.

Nabil Najjar is managing director of Delta Strategies, and the Bow Group’s research fellow for defence and security

Good intentions aren't enough

Ben Harris-Quinney argues for a new way of thinking about foreign affairs

There is a common assumption that policy makers today have a more enlightened, more insightful understanding of the world than their predecessors.

It is seen as backward, if not dangerous, to view the world through any other lens than that of neo-liberalism, and in foreign policy terms the panacea of neo-liberal interventionism.

There are, however, clear signs that this approach, and the foreign policy that has manifested from it, has failed to deliver either its stated aims or the will of the British people.

The age of Empire cost Britain dearly in blood and treasure, at the height of imperial expansionism public anger at loss of British life in foreign fields prompted a shift in policy towards colonial governorships and British trained foreign soldiers to keep the peace.

Even in consideration of our great investment, the Empire subsequently paid its dues in hard and soft power terms, propelling the United Kingdom to preeminence on the world stage.

British Foreign policy in the post-cold war era has sought no such balance to its considerable investment. The United Kingdom over the last 25 years has intervened in conflicts in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iraq

again, and Libya - we have little to show for it but gravestones, budget deficits and enemies.

Parliament's rejection of intervention in Syria (on the side of ISIS rebels) in September 2013 underlined that the paradigm of intervention without British security being at stake or without tangible benefit to our interests is no longer acceptable to the British people.

Even today, as the looming threat of ISIS grows at home and abroad, there is markedly weak public support for a third Iraqi incursion, or any form of significant overseas intervention, with the backdrop of 25 years of promise and failure.

A bill was quietly passed through Parliament this month, committing 0.7% of UK GDP to international aid, without adequate public debate or support, and no clear demonstration of how the policy would benefit Britain.

Many of the neo-liberal school, against which the more recent doctrine of neo-conservatism has failed to define itself, see understanding foreign policy in terms of national interest and interstate relations as having been replaced by a communitarian approach towards a "global community".

The majority of British citizens do not subscribe to this analysis, and yet still

have to pay for those foreign policies, and die for them.

This approach can no longer be justified democratically, neither can we any longer afford international follies with great cost and no benefit.

A new paradigm is therefore required, with a much greater focus on our government's responsibility to its own people and their resources.

International intervention, whether it may be in a diplomatic, aid or military context, will always occur, but it would be unacceptable for any future intervention to not make a clear case for how Britain will benefit.

Let us imagine a scenario 10 years hence, where a beleaguered civilian population desire to throw off the yoke of a tyrannical dictator. They have the option to rise up alone, receive support from a ruthlessly mercantile China in return for open ended control of natural resources, or British and allied support in return for preferential trade agreements and a governor to guide the transition to a freer and safer society.

It may not be a realistic option immediately, when the world has become used to calling on the services of the west as global policemen without necessity of compensation. But the resulting reticence of western citizens to support such interventions will eventually force a realisation that a rebalancing of the British role on the world stage, as partner rather than savior, is better than the alternative.

The future of British foreign policy should not only ask what the benefit to Britain will be, but it must be a priority.

The conservative philosopher Roger Scruton recently addressed the Bow Group in stating that "National loyalty is a far securer foundation for addressing international problems than any system of global institutions". It demonstrates a view of the future of British foreign policy that not only places British interests at its centre, but draws the foundation of those interests from our citizenry.

The Conservative Party pledged in the run up to the 2010 general election to enshrine the Military Covenant in law, a Covenant which first pledges to only commit British troops where British interests are demonstrably at stake. This sacred bond is paramount, but so is the realisation that a government is elected to act in the interests of all of the British people, over and above those of any other nation, however deserving their cause.

This should be the basis and future of conservative foreign policy, but all other policy also.

Ben Harris-Quinney is Chairman of the Bow Group

#bringbackourgirls

Jacob Zenn calls for British military and diplomatic support in the fight against terrorists threatening the largest Commonwealth nation in Africa

An ally of the UK and US for over 50 years, Nigeria has long been West Africa's regional powerhouse. But today the country is facing a threat to its sovereignty unlike any other since independence in 1960. The West, and particularly Britain, has the moral, security and economic obligations to work with Nigeria to overcome this crisis.

The challenge is Boko Haram, the ISIS of West Africa. Boko Haram confirmed this when its leader, Abu Shekau, declared parts of northeastern Nigeria to be an Islamic Caliphate on August 14. Three weeks before this, Shekau announced support for ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. He also promised to revive the pre-colonial practice of kidnapping non-Muslim girls and selling them as slaves after Boko Haram kidnapped more than 250 schoolgirls, mostly Christians, from the town of Chibok on April 14. Reports continue to surface of more girls forcibly 'married' to Boko Haram militants, young boys stolen and conscripted into Boko Haram's ranks, and Boko Haram marking the doors of Christians – a practice modelled after ISIS in Iraq – before slaughtering them.

I published a report with the Bow Group on the 100-day anniversary of the Chibok kidnapping. I recommended the UK, US and other Western countries lead a coalition to track Boko Haram's funding sources and break its inter-national connections. Countries ranging from

India to Egypt are believed to host traffickers of arms and drugs to Boko Haram from their territories that fund and supply the insurgency in Nigeria. These countries, too, could join this effort.

My report stated with regret that the US State Department under Hilary Clinton did not designate Boko Haram as a terrorist organisation until November 2013, delaying the possibility of a financial crackdown on the group. The UK, for its part, designated Boko Haram and its al-Qaeda-trained faction, Ansaru, as terrorist groups in 2012 after the kidnap and murder of two engineers, a Briton and an Italian, in northwestern Nigeria. But since then, Boko Haram and Ansaru have kidnapped more UK, French, German, Italian, Lebanese and Chinese citizens, including nuns, priests, and children, and received millions of dollars in ransom money. In July 2014, Boko Haram began deploying teenage girls as suicide bombers to attack fuel depots that supply international markets, including one in Lagos, in horrors that should only strengthen our moral resolve to act.

The West will have to coordinate with its Nigerian partners. However, President Goodluck Jonathan says there are Boko Haram collaborators in his government. Some opposition politicians have also been tied to Boko Haram through phone calls. This increases the risk that intelligence and supplies shared with the Nigerian security forces could leak into the wrong hands.

To overcome this concern, President Jonathan should increase transparency and try collaborators and captured Boko Haram leaders in the court of law. Nigeria also needs to improve transparency about military procurement in the face of criticism from soldiers who say they are under-equipped to combat Boko Haram with its weapons from Libyan stockpiles. This transparency will assure Western allies that military aid will be used effectively.

The West also needs to exercise leadership in organising a regional counter-insurgency strategy with Nigeria and its neighbours, Chad, Cameroon and Niger. These three countries recognise they are conduits for Boko Haram's smuggling, training, financing and recruiting. Commendably, in the past year they have begun cracking down on Boko Haram, but their cooperation would be more effective if parlayed with Western leadership, oversight and training.

Satellite imagery from the West can also track Boko Haram's convoys in the desert before the militants massacre civilians, attack military barracks, or kidnap children. This is no easy task with Boko Haram operating in three states of northeastern Nigeria (whose combined size, of 150,000 km², is larger than the UK). But aerial intelligence is one of the best ways to alert Nigeria about Boko Haram movements before attacks without putting Western boots on the ground.

There should be no false equivalencies about who is at fault for the crisis in Nigeria. Boko Haram's strategy is to kill, kidnap, and cleanse, especially Christians.

It engages in combat in civilian areas so that innocents are the first casualties in the crossfire. When it gains controls of a town, it destroys the schools, churches, and government offices. Grievances in Nigeria about corruption and impunity must be respected, and it is up to the government to clean up its own house. But Boko Haram's actions are no means of addressing such grievances. The group represents only terror.

Though Nigeria has been caught off guard by the brutality of Boko Haram, its people can rally together. Despite divisions between north and south, Muslim and Christian, and the country's ethnic groups, the people are showing a patriotic instinct, with 57% approving of the wartime President and key Muslim leaders, such as the sultan of Sokoto, denouncing Boko Haram's use of Islam to justify genocide.

The West must exercise leadership now. It starts with cutting off funding to Boko Haram, providing intelligence to Nigeria and its neighbors, and demanding transparency in exchange for Western military support. It ends with Boko Haram being defeated militarily and its ideology being discredited. Boko Haram is not a local, isolated, and disorganised insurgency. It is part and parcel of the networks terrorist groups like ISIS that share strategies, funding, and arms. Finishing off Boko Haram will also mean eliminating the most violent African branch of this global network.

Jacob Zenn is an Associate Fellow of the Henry Jackson Society and the Jamestown Foundation

Protect our most basic rights

Benedict Rogers suggests ways the Conservatives can put religious freedom – including the right to disbelieve – at the heart of foreign policy

Scenes of Christians and Yazidis fleeing Iraq have illustrated stark and graphic headlines in recent months. Rarely has there been a time when freedom of religion as a basic human right has been more severely violated, and when a coherent response from the international community to protect this right more desperately needed.

Yet Iraq is the tip of the iceberg. Freedom of religion or belief, as it is set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is denied, restricted or threatened in almost every corner of the globe, affecting every religion somewhere. Article 18 is not only a universal human right: it is a human right that is violated universally. Whether it is Christians from the Middle East or Nigeria, Eritrea or North Korea, China or Cuba, Sudan or Vietnam, or whether Muslims in Burma, China and Sri Lanka, Buddhists in Tibet, Baha'is in Iran, or non-Sunni Muslim minorities such as the Shi'a or the Ahmadiyya, who suffer alongside Christians in countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia, according to the Pew Forum, 75% of the world's population live in countries with high levels of restrictions on freedom of religion or belief.

Furthermore, it is not simply religious adherents who are affected. Article 18 is sometimes thought of, wrongly, as a human right for 'religious people' and of little concern to others. But Article 18

protects the freedom to 'not believe' too. And so when atheists are arrested, jailed, tortured, persecuted, as they have been in places such as Indonesia, Egypt and Nigeria, that ought to concern us too. I visited a young man, Alexander Aan, in prison in Indonesia twice. He was jailed not because of his religious beliefs, but because he declared, on social media, that he had none.

What should a Conservative government do to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief?

It is fair to say that the current Coalition Government has already done more than any previous government to give profile and attention to freedom of religion or belief. It became one of the government's six human rights priorities. Two successive Ministers, Alistair Burt and Baroness Warsi, made it their own personal priority and championed the issue energetically. Britain began to co-ordinate efforts with counter-parts in Canada, which has an Office of Religious Freedom and an Ambassador-at-Large, and with the United States, which has both a State Department Office of International Religious Freedom led by an Ambassador-at-Large, and a US Commission on International Religious Freedom, mandated by Congress. Several conferences were held on the theme at Wilton Park, the Sussex country house loosely affiliated with the

Foreign Office, and Baroness Warsi delivered a key speech at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. She also established an Advisory Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, bringing in experts from civil society and human rights organisations. The FCO introduced a toolkit on freedom of religion or belief. The Prime Minister, too, has made speeches on the subject, most notably to a gathering of Christian leaders at Easter this year.

Others have also helped give the issue profile. HRH The Prince of Wales delivered an excellent speech in December last year. Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury have been outspoken, as has the former Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks. Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander has begun to engage with the issue too, writing a powerful article in The Daily Telegraph just before Christmas and speaking on the subject to Christians on the Left this summer. The work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Freedom of Religion or Belief has increased awareness of the issue in Parliament.

What more can be done?

First, since the departure of Alistair Burt and Sayeeda Warsi, and William Hague who pledged to put human rights "at the very heart" of foreign policy, there is concern that momentum and profile could be lost. As with all issues, much depends on the personal commitment of individual Ministers and officials. The Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond,

should make a speech on the issue soon, to indicate continuing commitment to freedom of religion or belief as a priority.

Second, because so much currently depends on personal commitment (and if a Minister changes, momentum can be lost), the Prime Minister should appoint a Special Envoy on international freedom of religion or belief to co-ordinate efforts across government. There are now special envoys on a whole range of themes and countries, so why not freedom of religion?

Third, as Lord Cormack proposed in a recent debate on this very topic in the House of Lords on 24 July, the government should convene a global summit on freedom of religion. They recently held one on sexual violence in conflict, and another on female genital mutilation. Given that, as Lord Cormack says, religious persecution "is a terrible problem because the future of civilisation – no less – is at stake", why not hold a global summit to co-ordinate efforts and highlight the scale of the issues?

Fourth, while aid should never be held ransom in a way that harms those in direct need, questions should be asked about how our aid is used. I don't believe humanitarian aid should be denied to people whose governments violate freedom of religion. But it would only be sensible to monitor the use of government-to-government support, to ensure that British taxpayers' money is not being used, for example, in education curricula that teach hatred in

madrassas in Pakistan. Aid should also be deployed positively and consciously to promote freedom of religion and inter-religious harmony, by funding civil society initiatives in countries of persecution.

There is much more that could be done, but these four areas would be a good start for the next Conservative government, and would build on the foundations laid in the past five years. I hope that the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission's two reports will be

read and implemented, that the House of Lords debate on 24 July, and other debates in both Houses over the past twelve months, will be studied, and that a Conservative government will make freedom of religion an even greater priority in the future.

Benedict Rogers works for Christian Solidarity Worldwide, a human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion or belief for all, and is a co-founder and Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission.

Rip-off Europe

*It interferes with your daily life much more than you think, explains
Rory Broomfield. Britain must get out*

The EU has a bad reputation at the international level. It is often thought of as a set of institutions based in Brussels and Strasbourg that are run by dull men in grey suits. It is somewhere or something that only deals in the abstract: this trade deal, that conference, this event. This is all true, but the net result of all EU activity is a set of personal restrictions on those who live and work within the EU as well, in terms of both their incomes and their choices.

First, EU regulations and directives put UK jobs at risk. Whether in banking or manufacturing, the impact of regulation is felt by businesses and employers throughout the UK. Recent research by The Freedom Association found that between 150,000 and 200,000 jobs within the financial districts of London are currently at risk by new financial regulations from the EU (see our report,

'Freedom to Attract Trade and Investment', published by The Hampden Trust in association with TFA). Further research by The CityUK in March 2014 complemented this finding and confirmed the figure of 200,000 jobs. In the manufacturing sector, Business for Britain, in its 'Energy Policy and the EU' report, found that 1.5 million jobs across the country have been put at risk by EU energy directives. The Better Off Out campaign has evidence that the employees in power plants were particularly under threat from Brussels, due to similar pieces of regulation.

However, EU red tape also means that jobs are sometimes not created in the first place. John Redwood MP explained this earlier this year when he argued on his blog that at least 500,000 jobs have not been created in this country, simply because of EU regulations. He estimates that there could be around 450,000

more jobs in manufacturing, 50,000 in the energy sector and 30,000 in farming if the UK had a different relationship with the EU. Regulation does not just put jobs at risk: it destroys any prospect of them being created – on Redwood's estimate, over half a million Britons are potentially out of work due to the stranglehold of the Eurocrats.

These figures show that, even if the EU creates employment (which rarely it does), it kills potential vacancies too. The vast majority of jobs are, of course, created by businesses that are free and able to trade and create opportunities. The UK now sells more to the rest of the world than it does to the EU, and non-EU countries like Switzerland sell roughly 4.5 times more to the EU than the UK. In other words, EU membership is not a prerequisite for trade to take place and jobs to be created.

The EU's impact goes further, as it pervades our lives even deeper. Energy directives do not just apply to power stations, but also have the effects of limiting the supply of vacuum cleaners (and potentially other household products), reducing consumer choice, and forcing ever-higher costs onto buyers and sellers alike. Higher costs are also a result of the EU's Customs Union, which places a tariff on products coming into the UK from outside the EU. As Professor Patrick Minford CBE argued in a further paper published by The Hampden Trust and TFA, this tariff costs the UK 3% of GDP per year and, along with the effects of other policies such as the Common Agriculture Policy and Common Fisheries Policy, causes household bills to be pushed up. Taxes like the EU's minimum VAT tariff (at 15%), which Member States are obliged to enact, mean that the UK Government, even if it

wished to reduce the VAT rate, has considerably less room for manoeuvre in reducing the cost burdens on everyday items from petrol to groceries.

So the EU's competences, regulations and policies cost the UK money. In energy, in food and in household products generally (to name just a few areas), these costs are invariably passed down to the consumer - i.e., you. This is, of course, before including the costs of the EU membership fee and other associated costs.

However, there are alternatives to the status quo. Other countries have formed a different relationship with EU – states such as Australia, Canada, Norway and Switzerland – and in such a way that benefits both the state and the citizen. These different relationships have proven to be ever-stronger, lessening costs and increasing opportunities. They demonstrate that full EU membership does not cut off a country from trading with businesses within the EU: people in Australia or Norway benefit from stronger trade links and fewer barriers, without the banning of products and the lessening of choice. This has not led only to Canadians and Swiss being some of the wealthiest people in the world today, but has also led to them being some of the happiest.

We do not have to be a Member State of the EU to have a positive relationship with the EU, one where Britons have more opportunity, greater freedom of choice and increased wealth. As these examples show, both the UK and its citizens would be better off out the EU.

Rory Broomfield is director of The Freedom Association

Only perseverance will pass the grade

Robert Peal on why the Govian reforms must continue

Education may be the only cabinet role where an incoming minister in 2015 will not be encouraged to 'create more waves' than their predecessor. As Michael Gove explained in a speech to the Social Market Foundation in February 2013, his mission in government fell nothing short of overturning the "betrayal" of British pupils by progressive education since the 1960s.

When Gove came into power, progressive education was orthodoxy within state schools. The widespread promotion of 'trendy' teaching methods, dumbed-down curriculums and lax approaches to school discipline were all endemic within the education establishment. Not so now. Challenging the education establishment – which consists of teacher training institutions, local authorities, government quangos, and teaching unions – was a fight that Gove threw himself into, with some significant successes.

Of Britain's secondary schools, 56% are now academies, as are 12% of our primary schools, meaning they are free from local authority control. In addition, teachers, parents and charities can now establish new state schools from scratch. Currently there are 252 of these 'free schools' open, with many more to follow. This has been an enormous achievement – when a similar policy was attempted in the late '80s, just 15 such schools were established.

The challenge for the next government is to ensure that this liberalisation of the education sector translates into system wide improvement. Gove was not liked

by teachers, but a Conservative manifesto could win back some of their support by promising to sort out the schools inspectorate, Ofsted. Founded in 1992, Ofsted is often assumed to be on the side of rigour and school standards. Sadly, this is not always the case. Many inspectors have a pronounced sympathy for 'trendy' teaching methods, and for too long they have been able to penalise schools for not conforming to this orthodoxy.

Michael Wilshaw, Gove's appointment at Ofsted, has done some excellent work – in particular challenging schools to improve pupil behaviour. However, he has been too blind to the issue of teaching methods. Significant reforms to Ofsted are promised for September 2015. The Conservative party must promise that these reforms will curtail the malign power the inspectorate sometimes wields: Ofsted's role should be focused on finding failure, not defining success. The curtailing of Ofsted's power is an issue on which everyone in education, from teaching unions to right-leaning think tanks, seems to be in agreement. Ensuring it takes place would be an easy crowd pleaser for a new education secretary.

Next on the list needs to be examination reform. The content of GCSE and A-level examinations is far more important than the national curriculum in influencing what pupils actually learn at secondary school. However, here the government has so far made limited headway. Important structural reforms have taken place. The days of widespread grade

inflation are over, and next year we will see the scrapping of the terrible accountability measure of '5 GCSEs graded A* to C including English and Maths' which created a perverse incentive for state schools to focus on converting Ds into Cs, and ignore achievement at the top. It is a celebration of mediocrity.

However, the reform of examination content remains in its early stages. As any parent who has glanced at their child's homework practice papers will know, the content of many of today's GCSEs is absurdly dumbed down. Compared with the GCSE of yesteryear, let alone the O-level it replaced in 1986, it offers little challenge to our brightest pupils.

The current thinking is to use the exams regulator Ofqual to stipulate more challenging exam content. This is taking place, but it is a lengthy process. The reformed GCSEs in English and maths will be sat for the first time in 2017, sciences, geography, history and languages a year later. This leaves a great deal of time for the diehards of the education establishment to subvert Gove's original intention, and simply recreated the current ubiquity of non-academic slush.

A courageous move for the next government would be to break the GCSE cartel, and allow a return of the O-level. Gove flirted with this idea in his early days as education secretary, but could not carry it through. For a new Conservative government, such a measure would show a clear dedication to high academic standards.

University education faculties remain a redoubt of progressive educational

ideas and sociological theorising. Disabusing new teachers of the nonsense they have learnt during their training can be a frustrating process for schools. The government have made headway here through 'school direct', where teachers train on the job at outstanding schools. However, to challenge the university education faculties further, new training institutions should be allowed, like free schools, to set up from scratch and certify teachers. Like the 'teacher colleges' of old, these could be practical, commonsensical, and devoid of ideology.

Lastly, the next government should think hard about the presentation of education reform. Gove did a tremendous job confronting the education establishment, but this made him a hate figure in some quarters. With reforms already beginning to bear fruit, the next government should deliver a more positive message through celebrating the successes of exemplar academies and free schools.

As an example, King Solomon Academy (KSA) is situated in the ward with the highest levels of child deprivation in London, and three-quarters of its pupils qualify for extra financial aid. However, when they took their GCSEs for the first time this summer, 93% achieved five good grades, and 75% achieved the academically challenging English Baccalaureate – more than many independent schools. There is little surprising about how this was achieved: KSA has firm discipline, a dedication to academic achievement, and a refusal to make excuses on behalf of its pupil's backgrounds.

Such successful academies and free schools, of which there will be an increasing number in the coming years, have the potential to become exemplars of a new style of schooling. The next Conservative manifesto should base their campaign on celebrating such success

stories, and allowing their number to grow and grow in the coming years.

Robert Peal is a teacher, education researcher, and author of 'Progressively Worse: the burden of bad ideas in British schools'

Return of the sage on the stage

Traditional teaching is essential for improving social mobility, says Jane Kelly

For the Left, the failure of British people to better themselves, rather than live on benefits, can be blamed on the existence of the Bullingdon Club. Over the last few years, it seems, evil young toffs have somehow done us down and destroyed a meritocracy.

A recent report from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, based on a study of 4,000 business, political, media and public sector leaders, showed that although only seven percent of the population are privately educated, nearly two-thirds of senior army officers and over half of permanent secretaries and senior diplomats went to private schools.

Frances O'Grady, leader of the TUC, at the start of their recent conference, claimed that we now live in a 'Downton Abbey society'. She quoted the kind of statistic long loved by the Left, "the five richest families own more wealth than the poorest twelve million", and in so doing, deliberately conflated the swelling ranks of the elite with current pay freezes in the public sector.

But arguments about elitism deliberately miss the point, because for some the truth is strangely unpalatable. To restart social mobility we need to change our

education system, not from the top but from the bottom.

In 2013, a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found England was the only wealthy country where school-leavers are worse at maths and reading than their grandparents. I first saw this astonishing failure in our education system in 2007 when I began teaching literacy in HMP Wormwood Scrubs.

Forty five percent of the prisoners were foreign, from Nigeria, Jamaica, Somalia, Ireland and Poland. I was astonished at how well educated they were. Even Africans who had often had no formal secondary education were functionally literate. They read papers, enjoyed political discussion, could listen to me, the teacher, and, in fact, behaved as if I was worthy of huge respect - if not even fear. They loved learning new things.

Not so the English lads. They would put their heads on the desk and whine, "It's too hard, miss. Why are you using those funny old words?" The English couldn't listen or learn, had a tiny vocabulary and seemed to know nothing. Some were illiterate, others had no interest in anything but football. Some of the black Britons were slightly more aspiring, but

many of them were obsessed with music and drugs.

I was shocked that Africans, often educated in dire poverty, could learn, but white boys, from schools with all the latest technology, could not. It was also noticeable that unlike the Africans, the teacher meant nothing to them, and was an object of irritation at best.

Teacher and writer Daisy Christodoulou has identified the prevailing myths in English education which she believes are letting children down badly. These include the idea that knowing how to look facts up on line is a 'skill' more important than retaining information, that facts prevent understanding, teaching knowledge equals indoctrination, and teachers standing up and teaching is a sign of classroom 'passivity'.

A few years ago Christodoulou led her Warwick University team to victory on University Challenge. A second generation immigrant from Cyrus, brought up in a tower block in Stepney Green where her parents were market traders, she has the daring idea that all children should get the chance to become brainboxes like her.

Based on her experience as a teacher, Christodoulou, who attended private school under the assisted places scheme just before it was abolished by Labour, believes young people in state schools now have vast gaps in their knowledge and understanding, and that traditional fact-based lessons would serve them better. For her, skills depend on facts, not the other way around.

She studied nine recent Ofsted reports on different subjects, analysing 228 lessons in total. In all of them children were busy on Google while the teacher remained a 'guide on the side' rather than a 'sage on the stage'. Christodoulou

wants teachers to pour facts onto children in the classroom and believes that direct instruction from a teacher is highly effective. As an English teacher, she saw pupils struggling to write essays without any knowledge of grammar or sentence structure, looking up words, unable to understand the definitions. They displayed what she called a "shaky grasp of the fundamentals".

Christodoulou has been widely attacked for her views, which until recently, like immigration and sex abuse, could not be mentioned in polite society. What she says is heresy to most teachers in the NUT, the people who vilified Michael Gove. They refer to children in South Korea having to memorise a hundred pages of facts per subject, as if that were akin to child abuse. Their dislike of learning facts for their own sake is shared by Ofsted inspectors.

A new paradigm is slowly emerging which shows the importance of teaching facts in class and changing the long term memory. Modern myths in education have led to essential cultural capital increasingly going to a privileged few. One piece of research tested the amount of historical, geographical and literary knowledge needed to read one copy of the New York Times. Another study, by E D Hirsch, demonstrated the need for facts which are stored in our long term memory. If such knowledge is not there, a person is excluded from cultural understanding and cannot advance.

The Conservatives must continue to explode those educational myths which have done the most to prevent the growth of a meritocracy in Britain.

Jane Kelly wrote features for the Daily Mail for 15 years, and is now a freelance writer and artist

Hands off our children

Laura Perrins on how the Tories have lost their way over marriage policy

The fact that the Tory family policy is interchangeable with those of Labour and the Liberal Democrats illustrates how unappealing the current Conservative Party is to socially conservative voters. We have watched the Tories engage, for their entire term in government, in a shameless and unedifying bidding war as to which party can pour the most amount of taxpayer's money into the childcare industry. The childcare subsidy, for instance, will cost at least £1 billion. And I thought we were shrinking the deficit?

Ultimately, this childcare subsidy will prove disastrous, not just for the unfortunate one-year-olds dumped in nurseries from morning to night, and their families, but the State and the Conservative Party also. I have no doubt the current loaded Conservative Party 'survey' that asks voters if they think childcare is the 'number one issue facing the entire country' is a prelude for even more State hand-outs in this area.

This is one expense the State cannot afford - paying parents to pay another person to care for their own children. But perhaps the slow learners in the Tory party will eventually realise that they will not be able to outbid Labour and the Liberal Democrats when it comes to spending other people's money.

The only policy of significance that divides the parties is the transferable tax allowance between married couples. Labour and the Lib Dems oppose it, of course, because they do not like

marriage as it produces stability and less reliance on the State. Less reliance on the State means fewer jobs for the progressives - and we cannot have that.

It will also mostly benefit parents who care for their children at home, as these will be the only ones who have an allowance to transfer to their spouse. Labour and Lib Dems also do not like full-time mothers. They are out of the workforce and, shamefully, caring for their own children. I believe Chancellor George Osborne called this a "lifestyle choice". We cannot have this either.

However, as the Conservatives have left the introduction of the allowance so late, and as it is such a derisory amount applying only to basic rate taxpayers, it will be the first policy to be scrapped should they lose the election. But then Mr Osborne has set it up this way, for he does not believe government should be involved in this marriage business.

For all that, Conservatives do quite like getting involved in the marriage business when it suits them and their modernising agenda. They jumped feet first into gay marriage, despite the fact this fundamental change transformed marriage from an institution for the protection of children produced in such a union of man and wife into one entirely dependent on adult sentiment. Adults rule, OK?

Conservatives have always warned that if you shrink civil society and marriage, in particular, the State only grows to take its place. Here it is writ large.

And the Tories are involving themselves in other 'relationships' (talking about relationships and not just marriage is far easier these days). In a speech given to Relate, the Prime Minister made clear it is an appropriate role for agents of the State, such as midwives and health visitors, to add some relationship advice as well. Now we are going to have relationship 'support' in antenatal classes and health visitors will offer 'relationship advice'. The great Conservative plan to save the family is to increase the number of health visitors by 4,200 and re-orientate them to support not just the mother and child, but the whole family.

I am expecting my third child, and in my humble opinion midwives' energies should be focused delivering babies safely and giving out much needed drugs during labour. They should not be giving out relationship advice while the baby's head is crowning. As for health visitors, they are there to check newborn infants are reaching developmental milestones, not to hand out some post-baby sex tips most new mothers could do without. If this is the best the Conservatives have to offer, we might as well give up now.

Mr Cameron was also pretty delighted to say, "Four years ago I increased funding for relationship support by 50 per cent and pledged that this government would invest at least £7.5 million a year for 4 years." It is depressing to hear a Conservative Prime Minister sounding like a socialist. That £30 million over the next four years is not government money. It is taxpayer's money. This is the Nanny State come home.

If the Tories want to offer voters a genuinely conservative family policy, they must extend the transferrable tax allowance to higher rate taxpayers and increase the amount. It is now the case that, for the first time in decades, married spouses with dependents are treated in exactly the same way as single people. If you are going to claim to be family friendly, having a tax system that recognises families actually exist would be a good start. It is probably a good idea to recognise the extra expense having a family brings. This is why there must be a genuine tax allowance, based on marriage.

Unbelievably, the Conservative Party has set up a tax on aspiration for middle-income earners. Many middle-income earners are no better off if they get promoted from the basic rate to the higher rate as they will lose child benefit and face a punitive tax burden.

So much for being on the side of hard-working families.

In terms of cost, there is of course a profound moral difference between abenefit and a tax allowance - most Conservatives recognised this until recently. However, it still needs to be costed. If the party is concerned as to where it will find the money to allow families an allowance, it can start making some inroads into the gross amount of taxpayer's money poured into the childcare industry.

Laura Perrins is co-editor of The Conservative Woman website

Winning the generation game

If the Conservatives are serious about helping families, allow transferable tax allowances, says **Dr Patricia Morgan**

David Cameron recently declared that policies should be scrapped or revised if they fail to provide families with enough support. "For me," he said, "nothing matters more than family. It's at the centre of my life and the heart of my politics."

Any 'family test' would have its work cut out. Orthodoxy dictates how families come in all shapes and sizes, or exist wherever there are any children. All forms are equally good if it were not for the disadvantage or deprivation of children in their care. This sponge-like notion of family absorbs virtually any association or stage in the life cycle. In such blended families, the to-ing and fro-ing of couple relations is meant to be matched by migratory and androgynous parenting.

On the ground, a half of new-borns experience parental separation by 15 years of age. Falling marriage rates have outpaced divorce and family breakups have doubled since the 1980s, with cohabiters splitting at four times the rate of married parents. Family breakdown costs over £46 billion a year – more than defence – and is the ghost at the multibillion-pound extravaganzas to counteract poverty, educational failure and crime. Children fare worse in virtually every aspect of development which impacts into adult life and subsequent generations. Without fathers, boys miss role models, girls and

mothers lack protectors and the wider community is less safe. Declining marriage worsens adult health and well-being, strains public services, and increases housing demand.

Rather than the idea of parenting smoothly operating irrespective of any family form or relationship, the reality is often chaos and conflict. Officialdom has to construct clumsy and constantly evaded ways to involve stake-holders with their offspring, or when, where, why and for what they see them. Cameron's remedy for trouble and strife is counselling, along with extra help for the most troubled families – reminiscent of New Labour's multifarious meddling for transforming children's development.

Counselling kicks problems into the long grass, as the state is expected to make good the loss of social capital for children and nurture the skills which sustain communities, as support must constantly expand at the expense of productive society. Opening up lives to unprecedented intrusion, Scotland is gearing up to assign a Named Person to every child up to age 18, able to share information with a range of public authorities and intervene without parental consent.

While family forms are meant to be equal, the incentives they face are decidedly not. Tax credits pay up to an extra £7,100 if parents live apart or pretend to – like a

quarter of lone parents do. Ninety-five per cent of single parents would incur a 'couple penalty' if they married or lived together, with 10% losing a third of their income. Then there is additional council tax for being a couple.

Lone parents and single people have had a big fall in taxation in the new millennium, while one earner families have seen a substantial increase. This helps account for why UK married parents face a tax burden 42% above the OECD average. Their threshold is so low that a family with three children may even be paying higher rate tax when their disposable income is below that regarded as necessary for a minimum acceptable living standard.

Going back to Adam Smith, 'ability to pay' meant that taxation should target the surplus left after subtracting the amount necessary to support self and dependents. Universal provisions provide a floor on which to build, not a ceiling crushing advancement, deterring collaboration and cultivating dishonesty. The 1830s and 1940s saw retreats from means testing ventures – condemned for creating pauperisation at spiralling financial and moral costs. In recent times, measures to ensure some equity between those with and without responsibilities for others have been progressively replaced by 'targeted' welfare – encouraged by prevailing antagonism to the conjugal family. On and on ad infinitum, more and means tested benefits arise to offset the disincentives of other mean tested benefits, when evacuation from the morass is indicated.

Child benefit originated from an amalgam of the child tax allowance and family allowance, but the unfortunate name incites a 'take it from the non-needy' knee jerk. In a further punitive turn in 2013, a parent whose spouse's income exceeds £50,000 has part of this clawed back and, over £60,000, loses the lot. One earner couples with two children are left paying 89% more tax than double earners. The forthcoming Universal Credit will not compensate for the failure of the system to take account of marital commitment or family responsibilities.

Hostility to mutuality and interdependence fuels such discrimination. The live-in, working father might be among the best bargains society can have, but Nick Clegg's symbol of oppression is a man coming home from work and his wife putting a meal on the table. The political classes all sign up to Marx and Engels' decree that all females be in the workplace and all children be in public, 'wrap-around' care from birth.

Childcare support via tax credits (Universal Credit by 2016) covers 70% (to rise to 85% for income tax payers) of the costs for over 16 working hours a week for lone parents or two earners up to £300 for two children. A child care voucher scheme for children to 12 years pays up to £1,200 each per year (rising to £2,000) – if both parents work and earn up to £150,000 each or £300,000 total when a tax charge is imposed on other families with an income of £50,000.

The pressure to do something for married families to show they care pushed Government to let lower income couples transfer £200 of unused tax allowance. This sop of £4 per week will vaporise in benefit withdrawal. Labour would spend the pittance extending paternity leave at higher pay. While mother care is sex role tyranny, when men stay at home minding babies it is liberation for “the role they want”, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research. Making it “easier for mothers to return to work” after birth lessens the impact on their careers, claims Shadow Child Care Minister Lucy Powell - while hopefully undermining men’s employment and earnings.

Is it not totalitarian to pressurise parents into acquiescing to one recognised option for distributing their labour over the life cycle - and when

retirement ages rise and there are more years to pursue different options and build careers? Choices are for parents, not zealots seeking absolute statistical parity between the sexes at all time. Either spouse should be able to transfer any unused tax allowance to the other. Child allowances should be accessible to parents either via taxation or as cash and children of middle and higher earners are no less worthy than others. This logical and straightforward system would take many out of the poverty, employment and marriage traps as well as taxation. It would help re-build the conjugal family as a protected locale or legitimised zone of privacy where individuals can organise themselves and state intrusion is minimised.

Dr Patricia Morgan is a sociologist specialising in family policy and criminology

England’s lean and efficient land

Conservative councils can lead the way in innovation, says Francis Davis

On 20th November, the first think tank for the South will be launched from Winchester, that great city of Wessex. The new ‘Southern Policy Centre’ will welcome MPs, businesspeople, academics and council leaders of every political persuasion (including the CEO of Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership and the leader of Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead council) to explore what the future of the South holds now that Scotland has gained ‘devo-max’. The

keynote speakers will be Labour’s Shadow Infrastructure Minister, Lord Adonis, and the man who is credited with having delivered much of the Coalition’s passion for decentralisation, Cabinet Minister Rt Hon Greg Clark MP. But this will not be a parochial conversation because what the South does and says is as crucial to our UK future as the passions of the four million Scots. New thinking in the South, and learning across English boundaries, can add zest to the potential of every

locality. The irony is that Scotland and London receive more public funds than the English counties. Yet it is in these counties that some of the most creative responses to fresh challenges have been emerging.

Take Havant and East Hampshire on the South Coast, who have pooled their management team, created an award winning public services hub to co-locate staff and client care and in the process saved millions. Look to Councillor Paul Carter and the leadership of Kent County Council who have restructured around tough financial demands while also developing fresh directions both for the local economy and local health. On the coast again Cllr Sean Woodward has been so effective in combining his roles on his local LEP, on the County council and as Leader of Fareham District that he has landed an almost unique financial settlement for his voters. But perhaps one of the most creative of all areas to learn from has been the work championed by Cheshire West and Chester Council in the politically sensitive – and crucial - English North West.

Cheshire West is saving £50 million in five years. Talk to Steve Robinson, the Council’s CEO, and it becomes clear that this has only been possible via the detailed graft of unlocking huge savings from intense collaboration between stakeholders like local government, the police, education services and others, plus strong political backing from Council Leader, Mike Jones. Arriving in Chester from Stoke, Robinson

introduced a form of place-based budgeting even before Labour’s invention of ‘TotalPlace’ which sought to pool some Whitehall allocations locally to make scarce resources go further. Over the last four years Robinson’s Cheshire West and Chester, has been one of the elect numbers of ‘community budget’ pilots seeking to take this agenda to its logical extremes and pioneered by Local Government Secretary, Eric Pickles MP. The upshot is a set of plans that are revolutionary in their potential.

With an authority area that embraces neighbourhoods among the most enduringly poor in the country, such as Ellesmere Port, and those which host major banks and great wealth, such as parts of suburban Chester, to set out such a hope is not glib. Intense social challenges are a local reality and defeating it a bi-partisan passion on this patch.

Operationally, Cheshire West’s model is designed around creating a single point of entry to, and a single point of advocacy for, those families who approach public services. Co-located, jointly managed staff will have a mandate to champion their client through the system and various agencies so reducing time burdens, psychological pressure and costs for those looking for help. Collaboration in operations is being driven by shared leadership. A joint board is in place across the agencies involved and even the finance directors of each are meeting monthly to ensure a free-flow of resources beyond traditional boundaries.

A new suite of financial indicators at the top table is being matched with new recruitment criteria which emphasize the duty to collaborate at the coalface. Robinson is so hopeful that such detailed work will reap dividends that he has begun to argue for a new form of 'payment by results' that rewards those authorities that deliver real returns. Indeed he has recently been at the Treasury suggesting that if the police, local government, health and others can share budgets and operations to raise client satisfaction and cut costs, they should collectively benefit from the proceeds of such innovation, so enabling them to invest even more in defeating poverty and backing economic growth.

Combined with striking plans in cultural services, where a large lottery grant has been combined with very significant sponsorship support from the Bank of America, there is something of an emergence of a 'social silicon valley' effect in Cheshire, a buzz in the air that is beginning to attract new partners and investors. No wonder the council's leadership emphasizes the need to 'keep it dry', not to talk in broad sweep about possibilities but to pay real attention to concrete and achievable outcomes which deliver.

The opportunity, then, for a truly 'one nation' Southern Policy Centre is to learn from the best that comes from the North but then to make sense of such excellence in its own context. Under Labour, over 1200 central targets burdened local government, which meant that, in general and the South in

particular, it was not in a strong position to do its own thinking. But now is the moment for such fresh ideas to be unlocked as the coming years of austerity point to an ever increasing demand for innovation.

In time, of course, this may lead to a well-staffed think tank for the North. But until then the 20th landscape where England's time has come once again. November represents a fresh chance to reflect in a changing landscape where England's time has come once again.

Francis Davis is an author, journalist and a co-founder of the Southern Policy Centre, and was previously policy advisor to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and a private sector CEO.

Re-connect local and national successes

Henry Nelless on how Conservatives must win councils on the road to national victories

On 8 May 2015 we will all be hoping that the shoe leather and hours invested in the General Election campaign will have paid off and that, once more, we will see David Cameron addressing the nation outside 10 Downing Street, this time as leader of a majority Conservative government. However, the success of that day will be tinged with a sense of trepidation for the thousands of Conservative councillors spread across the nation who, over the course of the subsequent four years, will face their own election or re-election.

Defending a council seat when our Party is also in national government presents its own challenges, especially for those with marginal council seats. Winning seats which we do not currently hold also becomes a far more daunting prospect for local associations which are already stretched with the task of campaigning, recruiting and engaging members and fundraising. Since May 2010, the number of Conservative councillors across the UK has fallen from around 9,500 to just over 8,200 in May 2014. A further five years in government will, if we follow the accepted political wisdom, surely only result in a further reduction in the number of local councillors.

It need not, however, be this way.

I was brought up in the north east, went to university in Scotland and have lived in a London borough which has been led

by Labour for over 20 of the last 24 years (eight of which I was a councillor). I am therefore well used to being presented with challenging election prospects for the Conservative Party. There is no simple formula to fixing the conundrum of national versus local success, but there are some basic rules which experience, both good and bad, suggests we should follow.

Develop a vision. Conservatives in government, through the Localism Act and the General Power of Competence, have loosened the leash on councils. The opportunity to innovate is now very real: not just to reduce the costs of back office work, but to deliver exciting new front office services across education, regeneration and community involvement, to name but a few. What is critical, however, is that Conservatives, whether in control or in opposition, develop a clear and coherent vision of what they believe their area can become and how it can be delivered. Tools such as neighbourhood planning and community assets of value will only flourish under a local leadership which encourages them. Without that leadership, they will become yet another good intention that did not get a great deal beyond the statute book.

Engage our members and the community. The formulation of the plan for how you, as a councillor or candidate, and regardless of whether you are in office or opposition, will seek to make your

local community the very best it can be, cannot be successfully developed in the silo of the council committee rooms or the association offices. Most ideas can be enhanced through the input of others. This is where, locally, we have a real opportunity to re-engage both our members and the wider public. Not only the number of local Conservative councillors has fallen in recent years: Party membership has similarly reduced. Voter turnout was at 65.1% in the 2010 General Election (albeit up from a record low of 59.1% in 2001), the third lowest participation rate in a General Election since the introduction of universal suffrage. Whilst this disengagement from the political process is worrying, it need not be a permanent feature of Twenty-First Century democracy. The prospect for the involvement of both Party members and the public in the development of a blueprint for our communities and neighbourhoods provides an exciting means by which we can involve others in shaping policy and plans, which really do impact the day-to-day lives of voters, their family and their friends.

Policy-making stretches far beyond the national manifesto. If 'all politics is local', what better way to enthuse and rebuild local memberships by giving those members a real say over how their community should be developed and managed in the future?

Advocate it on the streets. Once the vision is starting to form and our members' have been involved, local councillors and candidates should be its biggest advocates. Advocacy, however, is too late if it is close to an election. It needs a structured campaign which communicates the key messages

through vivid and clear literature, door knocking and public meetings over a long period of time, allowing the policies to take shape in the minds of the voters. In my own election, we developed a fully-costed and exciting manifesto which could have transformed the lives of our residents and the prospects for our local businesses and voluntary organisations. Unfortunately, we were perhaps too fearful that our opponents would steal our good ideas and implement them before us. We tried to keep them close to our chests until the election was upon us. The difficulty then, however, was that we had not left sufficient time for our message to be absorbed by our residents. Voters will not hear of your vision - and, more crucially, support it - through some process of osmosis or accidental dissemination. It requires a full throttled buy-in by councillors, candidates and members to get out there and sell it.

If we are to break the inverse relationship between electoral success and representation in national and local government, we need to foster both a local vision and teamwork. None of this is easy and, in many areas of the country, it will just represent the start of a lengthy process of returning Conservatives in local government elections where, for many years, there have been none. If each of us is interested in politics because we want to make a difference, then time and effort spent now will pay dividends long into the future.

Henry Nelles was a councillor for the London Borough of Merton, 2006 to 2014

Our healthy future

*Conservatives must rediscover and apply authentic conservative principles if we are to win public trust over the NHS, explains **Rupert Beale***

Primum non nocere - first, do no harm - is the foundation of all good medicine; it is also the great conservative principle. Why then should we allow the political Left to have the whip hand in matters pertaining to health? I've no doubt that a future Conservative government could make the NHS the best healthcare system in the world; but it must first rediscover conservative principles. I emphasise rediscover because economic liberalism, powerful as it is, has little useful to contribute to front-line healthcare. That of course does not mean that the NHS can learn nothing from best practice in commercial enterprise, far from it, but rather that the NHS at its best is an institution like the army or judiciary: something that the UK indisputably does brilliantly despite, rather than because of, a lack of consumerism.

The fundamental problem with consumerism in healthcare is what might be called 'information asymmetry' by economists, or 'doctor knows best' by everyone else. We have to be able to trust our doctor when we are at our most vulnerable; it's important for all concerned that they don't even indirectly have profit as a motive. You might hope that a doctor would not expose a patient to danger and prescribe an unnecessary drug or suggest a futile operation purely for financial gain. But even assuming all

healthcare professionals uphold high ethical standards, is it so wicked to recommend a test of marginal diagnostic utility, or consult a variety of colleagues (each billing for their expertise) about a relatively trivial problem? There's plenty of evidence that this drives up the costs and decreases the efficiency of healthcare in the US, and we cannot afford this creeping into the UK.

Doesn't a lack of consumerism entail 'producer capture', a healthcare system designed around the needs of healthcare providers? This particular 'producer' finds that hard to credit - though undoubtedly changes to increase flexibility of the NHS workforce would be welcome. Increased flexibility would improve both staff morale and organisational efficiency (although there is an issue with healthcare unions, who represent their members' interests rather poorly). Despite this, the NHS compares very favourably to market-based and mixed-provision models of healthcare across Europe and across the Anglosphere. We score highly for efficiency, and poorly for what might loosely be termed 'customer service'. This suggests the NHS operates on a benignly paternalistic basis, which we on the Right should have no problem with whatsoever.

Is it possible to construct a free market in healthcare? Could this not increase efficiency? After all, we trust supermarkets to deliver food, and the motor industry to make cars - clearly the government couldn't take on these roles - isn't the NHS the Trabant of the west? The evidence suggests otherwise: Trabants were awful, by any sensible international comparison the NHS does pretty well. Furthermore, even allowing that it might be theoretically possible to have a market-based system that actually worked, as conservatives we have to be deeply suspicious of trying to fix something that isn't particularly broken. "Wouldn't it be lovely if..." doesn't constitute the proper basis for policy; we can safely leave that kind of nonsense to the Left - I'm thinking especially of the kind of Utopianism so rampantly on display from the 'Yes' side in the recent Scottish independence debate. We have a socialised system of healthcare, it works fairly well, it is the settled wish of the British people that it should remain socialised, and it is frankly not realpolitik to wish to change this.

If the NHS is doing well, do we simply rest on our laurels, secure in the knowledge that innovation will take care of itself, and that no reforms will be necessary to cope with the burdens of an ageing population and higher expectations of healthcare, whilst at the same time not increasing the share of GDP allocated to health? Obviously not - but the last point is important. We can't simply throw money at the problem; even if we had that money to

throw it wouldn't guarantee much of an improvement. The only viable solution is to concentrate on exporting and expanding best practice, from those parts of the NHS which function well to those that don't. How?

In my own speciality, nephrology, a great deal of care and attention is lavished on kidney transplantation. A group of very dedicated physicians, surgeons, immunologists, nurses, dieticians, pharmacists and other healthcare professionals work together cohesively and cooperatively. Data on outcomes is collected meticulously, and compared to other centres both nationally and internationally. Problems are anticipated as well as merely identified, unnecessary expenditure is carefully avoided, and a constant desire to improve things for patients underpins everything that's done. It's hardly a surprise that outcomes in kidney transplantation in the NHS compare favourably to anywhere else in the world. The challenge is to export this highly academic ethos to other parts of the NHS: the less glamorous work of caring for the elderly should have no less dedicated staff.

It's not a question of throwing monetary resources at the problem. In fact, we waste a huge amount of money providing inappropriate drugs to elderly patients when what we should be providing is good quality basic care. It's bad enough that we should spend money inefficiently, but worse is that we may well be spending money and causing harm. A lack of proper data

about whether what we are doing is actually leading to positive health outcomes cripples our ability to appropriately allocate resources. An academic ethos - by which I mean a focus on research and teaching, subject to peer-review - is the best guard against poor data, poor scrutiny and poor outcomes.

Exporting this academic ethos requires an extension of academic medicine from the confines of teaching hospitals to those parts of the healthcare system currently most distant from it, and it also must include appropriate training and mentoring of junior and middle-grade staff. This latter group constitute perhaps the most disaffected group of NHS workers; they have been very poorly served by New Labour reforms, and the coalition has perpetuated many of these errors. It should be a particular focus of future Conservative administrations to enthuse and empower junior medical staff. We should enable them to be unafraid of the charge of 'elitism'. We want them to be unashamed to be excellent, nobody wants a mediocre doctor, and in a system of socialised medicine the only real driver of improvement is to ensure we have excellent and highly dedicated staff.

I've set out some general principles by which I think a future Conservative administration should improve the NHS: use the existing excellence within the NHS to drive up the standards across the board, avoid any privatisation of front-line services, collect meaningful data

and use it to allocate resources and avoid causing harm. There are probably a variety of concrete policies that might coalesce from these principles, but there's only one which I think must be unavoidable: a future administration will have to grasp the NHS IT nettle. It may well be desirable to do this on a regional, rather than national, basis in the first instance - and, in sharp distinction to frontline care where the NHS has genuine internationally recognised strength, this will absolutely require the private sector, as well as some of the sharpest minds in the public sector.

There are further benefits of sticking to conservative principles on the NHS. By properly enshrining public ownership and public benefit of the NHS as a core Conservative policy, we would allay fears of healthcare professionals and patients, as well as preventing a potential line of attack from the Left. As an illustration of the power of this line of attack, it was bogus scaremongering over the NHS that propelled the Scottish Nationalists to within an uncomfortably close distance of success in the Independence Referendum. This was despite the fact that the attack made no logical sense whatsoever, given the devolved nature of the Scottish NHS! We have to believe in a publicly owned NHS in our hearts and minds, and we have to prove that we mean it.

Dr Rupert Beale is a consultant physician working in London

Mess with human life at our peril

*Healthcare law cries out for reform, says **Fiona Bruce**, and Conservatives stand for a culture of life*

Westminster watchers will have noticed an upsurge in Parliamentary activity on prolife issues. As well as the adjournment debate on abortion for disability which I secured in April, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Baroness Knight have led debates on the issues of three-parent IVF/mitochondrial transfer and sex-selective abortion. Members of the All-Party Prolife Group have tabled a steady flow of Parliamentary questions, prodding and harrying the government, the Department of Health and various organs of the health establishment in order to maintain momentum for the prolife cause and obtain information.

Prolife concerns have also topped the news agenda on several occasions in 2014, despite stiff competition from tragic events overseas. At the start of the year it was the Government's changes to Standard Operating Procedures for abortion clinics; later the twin scandals of sex-selective abortion and pre-signing of abortion authorisation forms by doctors – that is, without the doctor seeing or knowing anything about the woman requesting an abortion – played out in the headlines over the course of several weeks.

There has been a unifying theme in all of 2014's abortion stories, and it is this: the enforcement of the 1967 Abortion Act is in crisis. If there was ever a time when it worked, that time is long past. Of course,

the law has never really been properly policed; only one doctor has ever been prosecuted for carrying out an illegal abortion under the Act. The supposed intent of the Abortion Act was to provide for a small number of abortions for women in very difficult circumstances, but the number of abortions rose at a precipitous rate in the years following the passing of the Act and has remained at a high level for more than three decades, suggesting that clinicians and abortion providers have from the very start treated the law in a rather cavalier fashion, no doubt unanticipated by those Parliamentarians who voted for the Abortion Act to cover a few exceptional cases.

What is clear today is that we now have compelling evidence that the Abortion Act is being routinely treated with contempt by abortion clinics and the medical authorities, and repeatedly violated in both letter and in spirit. This first became apparent in early 2012, when it was found that some abortion clinics were offering abortion on the ground of gender and that many others were engaging in widespread and systematic flouting of government regulations, notably through the illegal practice of pre-signing of HSA1 abortion authorisation forms. A subsequent Care Quality Commission (CQC) investigation, reporting in August 2012, found evidence of pre-signing in no fewer than 14 NHS Trust areas.

The real bombshell resulting from that CQC investigation was not uncovered until this year. It emerged that, although the CQC had reported no fewer than 67 doctors who had pre-signed HSA1 forms to the General Medical Council, the GMC had taken no further action. This is despite the fact that pre-signing is, on the face of it, a criminal offence under the Act. This issue, like that of abortions on the ground of the sex of the unborn child, is causing real concern among Parliamentarians. As the Health Minister Earl Howe stated on 3rd April this year, "forms being pre-signed is a clear breach of the law and if it is found to be happening, a prosecution should be brought".

In some quarters the argument has been made that pre-signing in and of itself is not necessarily proof that a doctor did not complete an HSA1 form in good faith – after all, the argument goes, he might pre-sign for convenience but come back and examine the woman requesting abortion as required. But while this is technically possible in some cases, it is wildly implausible to accept it as a blanket defence of all such cases, particularly with the numbers involved. The Department of Health's own guidance on their interpretation of the Act appears to rule out a blanket refusal to prosecute for pre-signing, stating that pre-signing is illegal "without subsequent consideration of any information relating to the woman", i.e. if it could be proven that a pre-signing doctor did not consider any woman-specific information, he would in the Department of Health's view not be protected by the Abortion Act and so

would be liable to prosecution. However, no action has been taken to date against those involved, making it increasingly difficult to define what good faith actually means in the context of the Abortion Act. This is a wholly unsatisfactory situation.

Then of course there is the muddle over the legal status of abortion on the grounds of gender. The Department of Health continues to confirm that abortion on the ground of gender alone is illegal. Staggeringly, this is flatly contradicted by the abortion provider BPAS (British Pregnancy Advisory Service), the largest single private-sector abortion provider in the UK, performing well over 50,000 abortions every year – the vast majority of them funded by the taxpayer. They argue that the Act does permit abortion for fetal gender in some cases. BPAS Chief Executive Ann Furedi stated in an article last year that "there is no legal requirement to deny a woman an abortion if she has a sex preference, providing that the legal grounds are still met".

No-one can agree on what the Act means, or how it should be enforced, while it has been stealthily undermined through use of Statutory Instruments and Department of Health guidelines. The dramatic changes made to a new version of a document called Procedures for the Approval of Independent Sector Places for the Termination of Pregnancy are a good example of this. A previous version of this document stated that "medical practitioners must give their opinions on the reasons under the Act

for the termination following consultation with the woman", i.e. it was clearly expected and required that both of the doctors who authorised an abortion would actually meet and talk to the woman concerned. The 2012 version of the guidelines, by contrast, explicitly state that it is "not a legal requirement" for either authorising doctor to see the woman, saying only that "we consider it good practice that one of the two certifying doctors has seen the woman", but not insisting on this, and suggesting that "members of a multi-disciplinary team" can play a role in the consultation process.

It now looks increasingly as though there may be significant new legislation on abortion in the next Parliament. Voices within the health establishment and the Department of Health are calling for the Act to be reviewed and updated. The clear challenge for pro-lifers in the Conservative Party is to make sure that such change helps to create a culture of life, not a further entrenching of abortion. The areas where there are clear potential for positive change are sex-selective abortion, tighter enforcement and respect for the law, such as on pre-signing, and reviewing the ground for abortion for disability, which – to the complete shock of many who hear of it for the first time – is not limited to twenty-four weeks' gestation, but allowed by law up to the very moment of birth (see the Report of the "Inquiry into Abortion on the Grounds of Disability" I chaired last year: www.abortion-anddisability.org). Pro-choicers have their own objectives, of course, notably the abolition of the two doctors

rule. Pro-lifers must also pay close attention to resisting such changes where possible. The key thing to remember is that we can make progress, if we focus on achievable goals and think carefully about the best ways to achieve them, and bear in mind that many who would not naturally call themselves pro-lifers share our concerns on the above issues.

As a final thought, the way in which the abortion law has been widely ignored and circumvented should be a stern warning to Parliamentarians faced with the choice of legalising assisted suicide. The two issues are of course distinct, but the deteriorating respect for the abortion law should act as a huge flashing warning beacon to those claiming that their favoured policy is a limited humanitarian reform designed to be used in a small number of extreme cases, and is not intended to be the first step in a much larger reform. Assisted suicide creates enormous problems with public safety and the protection of the vulnerable, and the Party must remain committed to opposing any measure for its legalisation. Reading the debates which took place in the House of Commons during the 1960s with regard to the then-Abortion Bill, subsequently enacted, and intended for a few exceptional cases but which opened the floodgates, it is striking how similar they are to the debates which we are now having about assisted suicide.

Fiona Bruce is Member of Parliament for Congleton

A national wealth service

The NHS should be expensive at the point of delivery, says Dr Myles Harris

When an Argentinian visitor, we will call him Pedro, fractured his ankle in Oxford St, an ambulance was at his side in five minutes. The latest in splints was applied and he was soon in a well-equipped Accident and Emergency Department of a major teaching hospital. Not only was his fracture attended to, but when he told the doctor he had previously had heart trouble, an ECG and blood tests were speedily organised to see that all was well. Two hours later, on crutches, a follow up card in his hand to see two specialists, medical and orthopaedic, he approached the front desk to pay.

The lady behind the desk nearly fell off her chair. "But my dear it is free, this is the NHS", she said. "But I would like to pay". "You can't I am afraid, them's the rules. It's an emergency see, emergencies are free". "Anyhow," she added frostily, "the office where people have to pay is closed."

Pedro, sensing he was causing offence, the English were a strange people, felt it wise to retreat. He was however a man who believed in honouring his debts, and three months later a large cheque appeared on the desk of the CEO of the hospital. It has yet to be cashed in case it breaches payment rules. There have been four meetings already about it.

Although Pedro's story is not real, it reflects the truth. The lady behind the

desk was absolutely right, the NHS is practically free, the list of exemptions for foreigners so extensive one would have to be a Martian demanding a face lift to have to pay, and the reason why Pedro's cheque is still lying in the CEO's in tray is that overseas visitors, as one source said, "create debt". Debt is a dirty word in the NHS, an embarrassment to administrators who run the service and a threat to their bonuses.

This is because treatment is paid out of general taxation, it is not an insurance scheme where treatment is related to the size of the premiums you pay. This latter mechanism is what most countries offer, with a safety net offering free treatment for the poor. Instead the NHS is like a gigantic soup tureen with doctors, not actuaries, ladling out portions strictly in terms of clinical need. Rich or poor you get the same. The arrival of foreigners bearing VISA cards upsets this. They can't be refused treatment, but if it is to be fair, they can't pay for it either. If they want to do that sort of thing they can go to a private hospital.

The Department of Health claims it is about to change this. By the start of the next financial year 2015 visitors to the UK from countries who do not have reciprocal agreements with the NHS, the government is trying to wind such deals up to save costs. Visitors who are not on the big list categories exempt from

paying for NHS treatment, but who are planning to stay in Britain for more than six months, will have to pay a £200 insurance premium to obtain a visa. In addition the process of chasing debt within hospitals is to be tightened up with alerts sent automatically to the Office of Visitor Management when a patient is admitted. If you leave the country without paying you risk not being readmitted. One has the sneaking impression that such changes are cosmetic with Whitehall determined on absolute lack of business as usual.

Nor will such checks cover A&E where anything from a stubbed toe to a stroke is treated free. It gets around the difficulty of enforcing payment in a shifting crowd of people, as well as the problem of identification, more so now with millions of visitors from abroad. The British are not expected to carry ID cards, even NHS cards, so how would anybody check?

The general practitioner would be a good place to start, but GPs recently invited to take part in a scheme to do some low level vetting of patients' eligibility taking at most about three minutes of a receptionist's time, refused. They cited past delays by the Home Office in answering queries about a patient's eligibility, the risk of being sued if they refused treatment and the failure of successive governments to say who and who was not eligible. They were egged on by the left-leaning Royal College of General Practitioners. Its representatives declared that any checks would result in undetected

asylum seekers being deterred from seeking medical attention. As a result TB would sweep the nation. Why it has not swept through France, Spain, Germany Italy or Greece, who have checks, was not explained. There was no chance of it working anyway. Following a lawsuit brought by Nigerian asylum seekers, family doctors received specific instructions from the government that, under no circumstances, even if they suspected blatant fraud, were they to check on the eligibility of new patients for NHS treatment. Besides, the NHS numbers of patients registered with a GP are not cross checked to see if they are eligible for treatment. It is merely an administrative convenience to make access to patients' notes easier, and despite the fact that printed on NHS Medical cards is the statement that the card 'is proof that you are entitled to NHS treatment'.

Hospitals are supposed to do their own checking, many until now relying on a GP's letter, an NHS number and general appearance as proof. An old Cockney is unlikely to be dodging payment. Often however eligibility depends on a tricky definition of what is meant by ordinary residence. For example a wealthy American with severe heart trouble who has just come to live with his family in Britain, as long as he can prove he intends to go on doing so, can get his coronary arteries reamed out at your expense. But if you visit the US uninsured, suffer the same thing, and can't pay, you may find the US hospital seeking a warrant from a British court to seize your house to pay off the debt.

Asylum seekers in general are off the hook as you are only an illegal until you ask for asylum. All you have to do then is to play the system until you have been here too long to deport.

Why do we keep such a system? The same arguments could be applied to having a free Waitrose or Sainsburys. Food is even more essential than health. Just as our city A&Es are crammed with patients, many of whom are too lazy to register with their GPs or fear (incorrectly) detection if they do, so our supermarkets would degenerate into giant scrums with all the best foods swept from the shelves by the fittest and those who shout loudest.

Administrators argue the cost of chasing NHS debt, even providing the means to pay, is not worth the money we would collect. They miss the point. Payment, like justice, has to be not only made, but seen to be made. Ideally everybody should have an NHS card with their photograph and a finger print linked to a database. This we know is impossible, not because it can't be done, we have passports after all, but because Whitehall has proved itself too lazy and too incompetent to do so. Billions have been wasted on failed NHS computerisation.

Yet it need not be expensive. It would cost hospitals no more than the price of a 200-metre ethernet cable and a computer to link the Overseas Visitors Management office to a desk in the A&E above which is written, 'Foreign Visitor? Please Pay Here'. Most foreign visitors

are decent people only too willing to pay. Moreover with a simple collection service the rules could be changed from the present giant list of exemptions – designed so administrators can avoid work – to a list of those who to have to pay.

The new desk could also be used for the rest of us to pay a universal charge of £5 a visit to A&E, which would clear Britain's casualties of trivial illness (in Ireland the charge is €100 per visit, which, while people there grouse about it, they understand the need, many realising it is a deterrent to illegal migrants thinking of coming to the country). GPs should charge the same. Apart from lives saved, the saving of lost time from work, inconvenience and the anxiety of waiting would be huge. Soon we would wonder why it was not started years back.

Dr Myles Harris, a GP, is editor of the Salisbury Review

The unnecessary burden of carbon

Tony Lodge on how the Chancellor can reduce energy bills, avoid a power crisis and boost manufacturing

Conservative candidates are already printing their early election literature. For both new candidates seeking to introduce their credentials and established MPs preparing to defend their record, it is fair and credible to make promises of lower crime, more jobs, and economic growth. But one assertion stands out because it is very hard to defend, namely the promise to lower energy bills.

The fact remains that energy bills are rising and will continue to rise until draconian carbon taxes are stripped out and the consumer is given some genuine relief. Tony Abbott did it in Australia and won last year's election. Conservatives must now commit to do the same.

Carbon Price Support is not a buzz phrase around Westminster, but it should be. To give it its more commonly-known title, the Carbon Price Floor (CPF, or just plain old carbon tax) is slowly shaping up to become a real battleground at next year's General Election, impacting on the costs of living, specific industries and the economy as a whole. This draconian tax weighs heaviest on the very power stations which are providing the lion's share of our electricity supply, threatening higher prices, early power station closures and the prospect of thousands of manufacturing jobs being moved overseas.

So what is the CPF, why is it so damaging and why did a Conservative-run Treasury introduce it? Up until April 1st last year, the UK was part of the market-

based EU Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) and shared the same carbon prices as the rest of the EU. The ETS was launched in 2005 and covers more than 11,000 factories, power stations, and other energy-intensive installations in the EU. These high-energy users currently receive a trading credit which determines the upper limit of their carbon emissions. If a high energy user's carbon emissions exceed what is permitted by its credits, it can purchase trading credits from other energy users or countries. On the other hand, if an installation has reduced its carbon emissions, it can sell its remaining credits to other energy users.

The Treasury took the decision that the EU ETS price was too low to encourage investment in low carbon technology. It also saw a unilateral and rising CPF as a useful revenue raising tool. The Treasury assumed and anticipated growth in the Eurozone, which turned out to be false: it failed to model today's disastrous scenario, in which there is a huge disparity between UK carbon prices and those on the Continent. Because of the rising unilateral UK CPF, electricity generators will soon be paying over £22 a tonne of carbon emitted, compared with just £5 on the Continent.

This is a staggering disparity and represents more than a quadrupling of the carbon price for British power generators, compared with that faced by their competitors across the Channel. As a result, wholesale UK electricity prices could soon be almost double those in

Germany or Italy, not only costing consumers and energy-intensive industry dear but adding another layer of market distorting subsidy for already heavily-subsidised renewables.

Many observers had previously believed that the EU ETS price would start to increase as the Eurozone emerged from recession but the reality is the reverse. In recent weeks the EU ETS price has weakened further as Europe remains mired in recession and the disparity between EU and UK carbon prices has widened even further.

The CPF will tax emitters of CO₂ in the electricity generating industry. 75% of Britain's electricity supply industry is fossil fuel-based gas and coal. These extra costs will be passed to consumers. Relative to current (and optimistic) projections for the EU ETS price, by 2020 UK industry and electricity generators could be paying nearly three times as much for their carbon emissions as their EU counterparts.

This is particularly significant given the fact the UK looks to be set to embark on another 'dash for gas' for electricity generation, through the exploitation of shale deposits. This will increase further our dependency on fossil fuels in the short- to medium-term as new nuclear plants and commercially deployable carbon capture and storage technology is, at best, a decade away.

A decision by the Prime Minister to abandon Britain's CPF and return to the EU ETS would:

- Demonstrate that economic growth is at the heart of his economic strategy.
- Remove an unnecessary cost on less well-off households and consumers.
- Have no detrimental impact on

investment in future low-carbon generation such as new nuclear power and renewables (these receive their own Contract for Difference in the Energy Bill).

- Remove a market distortion that is obscuring investment signals for reliable conventional electricity generating capacity.
- Accept that there should be no cost disparity between Britain and our closest economic competitors – an unnecessary burden for the UK competing in, as the Prime Minister puts it, the "global race".
- Show a determination to reduce fuel poverty and help UK manufacturing. Provide international investors with certainty in their international investment decisions.
- Demonstrate a determination to reform and strengthen the EU ETS price across the Continent with the UK in the lead.
- Allow the UK to invest in its own fossil fuel resources so that they can be used in future carbon capture and storage (CCS) power plants.

As May 2015 nears, the Conservatives risk being saddled with the blame for a draconian tax which will begin to filter through on bills and industry costs this coming winter. Importantly, the Labour Party has voted against the CPF in the Finance Bill in recent years, so a policy opportunity is clearly theirs for the taking. Let's hope the Australian election mastermind in Downing Street does all he can to make sure Tony Abbott's approach is followed here and soon, before it is too late.

Tony Lodge is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Policy Studies and is author of 'The Atomic Clock – How the Coalition is gambling with Britain's energy policy'

Let lions lead the donkeys

Miles Windsor sets out his ideas for arresting the terminal decline in Party membership

Membership of the three main parties has been in steep decline over the past two decades. Labour Party membership has dropped from 311,000 in 1990 to around 187,500 members today. Liberal Democrats peaked briefly in the early 90's at around 101,000 before falling to today's figure of 49,000. However, the Conservative Party – previously enjoying a large grassroots membership base of up to 2.9 million (1951) – has seen its membership decline most dramatically from around 1 million in 1990 to around 134,000 today.

Politicians who wish to brush off concerns about membership numbers point to the general decreases in membership across political parties, but this neglects to take into consideration the increases in membership seen within minor political parties such as UKIP, whose membership rose from 10,000 in 2002 to around 40,000 today, and the Green Party, which is up from 5,268 in 2002 to around 13,000.

The reduction in engagement in political parties on this scale should concern us. A large proportion of the UK population feels deeply disenfranchised and wearied by our politics. Most of the electorate sees no opportunity to have a real democratic voice or contribute to policy – there is a popular perception that even the privilege of voting is irrelevant to the outcome of elections. Many see the three main political parties offering little which is distinctive or inspiring, toeing the middle (or

indeed left-of-middle) way. The public often views its political leaders as an over-paid, out-of-touch, elitist clique with little knowledge of, or interest in, the lives of ordinary people. What can be done?

Embrace Authentic Conservatism. Conservatism isn't easy to package in one tidy idea. It houses many traditions. The Conservative Party shouldn't be bullied into denying our identity as a party on the right of the political spectrum, nor should we erode the principles of conservatism in any misjudged attempt to broaden appeal. Conservatism, adequately communicated, appeals to a vast and diverse proportion of the electorate. It doesn't need mending or dragging leftward under the guise of 'modernisation'. We should be communicating a clear, inspiring and conservative vision for Britain.

We cannot do this with catchphrases, buzzwords and sound bites. The leadership of the party must establish a clear, overarching vision and a coherent set of plans to achieve that vision. Activists need a uniquely conservative cause behind which they can rally. People sign up to causes which they believe to be righteous and beneficial. It should be the case that people who believe in conservatism as the best set of philosophies and principles for the benefit of Britain, and who wish to see a conservative government implementing conservative policies, join the Conservative Party to support and promote this outcome.

Improve policy debates. The Conservative Policy Forums are a great idea but in reality they are little more than isolated debating clubs. Constitutions should allow members to petition local associations for debate on specific policy areas. The debate should seek to facilitate the attendance of the local Member of Parliament and he or she should be asked to state with reasoning his or her policy position. The debate would be followed by a vote. A brief report on the key points made in the debate and the vote would be recorded, posted on the association's website and sent to the office of the Conservative Party Chairman for comment. This process would empower party members to engage in policy discussion and contribute to the debate in a meaningful way.

Reform the Party Conference. Conferences are now, primarily, trade shows for lobbyists and cash cows for the hosts. The Westminster Village moves en masse to some province of the country for a few days in a year to make a demonstration of how connected they are to the UK as a whole – whilst locking out the local community with security fences and a police presence that makes it feel like you're in the more hostile parts of the Occupied West Bank. Inside, the small minority of political groupies in attendance have no vote and little opportunity to speak on policy or party direction. Party Conference should be a vibrant festival of politics, a hive of philosophy, debate and fellowship. It should be easier and more affordable to attend and a more interactive and engaging programme should be designed by members. It should look more like the Hay Festival – or even Glastonbury – than the current set-up!

Encourage authenticity in politicians. This is one of the most valuable yet underrated assets in a politician's arsenal. Voters value authenticity and have a keen awareness of when it is absent. It is often absent from the utterances of the biddable political classes, selected and promoted for their willingness to say and do what they are told. Authenticity is why Boris Johnson enjoys extraordinary popular support – even affection – in spite of his privilege and comical appearance. It is why Nigel Farage – the beer-swilling, cigarette-smoking, plain-speaking Ukip leader – is a pied piper for disillusioned Tories.

The party should be encouraging independent thought and lifting up individuals who communicate our shared vision with authenticity and integrity. This could be achieved through changes to the whipping of our politicians, the people we promote to positions of leadership in the party and the people who are encouraged to conduct media appearances. As with so many organisations, the true strength of the Conservative Party comes from its grassroots. When those at the top are willing to listen to those outside their coterie, they might be surprised at the wealth of wisdom, understanding and hard work that becomes available to them. What is required will be difficult for party bosses because it means relinquishing a certain amount of control. If they are brave enough they will be rewarded by those they empower and the electorate.

Miles Windsor, a political strategist, is on the Conservatives Candidates' List

The Bow Group's 10 Priorities for Freedom & Democracy in the Conservative Party

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Let Volunteers Elect A Party Board Chairman | 7. Recognise and Reward Volunteers formally |
| 2. Empower the National Convention to decide Party and National Policy | 8. Prioritise Online Communications and Digital Democracy in the Party and Nation. |
| 3. Hold a Conservative Annual General Meeting | 9. End the Coalition Government and make a commitment against future non-conservative coalitions. |
| 4. Push candidate selection entirely down and out to local closed primaries. | 10. Say no to state funding of political parties, and aim to bring membership income in line with corporate donations within 5 years. |
| 5. Reach out to external conservative groups which share our values | |
| 6. Let Volunteers Decide and Vote on the Conference Agenda | |

How to join the Bow Group

The Bow Group is growing. Annual membership costs £40, or £20 for those who are either under 25, in full time education or unemployed. To join please complete the form below and overleaf. For more information, please see www.bowgroup.org/content/join

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Postcode: Occupation:

Landline: Mobile:

Email:

Member who introduced you (if applicable):

FULL RATE

£40 per annum []

(Members may pay in excess of this amount at their discretion)

CONCESSIONARY RATE

£20 per annum []

(For those in full time education, unemployed or under 25)

Please tick the box, and kindly inform the Bow Group if your circumstances change.

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