

About this briefing note

This note summarises key points relating to science and higher education from the 2017 General Election manifestos of political parties in the UK and the devolved administrations.

This note is only intended to provide a snapshot, and does not represent every policy position of the parties. We encourage you to read each party manifesto and make your own decision. Full links to each manifesto are here:

Conservative: www.conservatives.com/manifesto

Labour Party: www.labour.org.uk/index.php/manifesto2017

Liberal Democrats: www.libdems.org.uk/manifesto

Scottish National Party (SNP): <https://www.snp.org/manifesto>

Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP): <http://www.sdlp.ie/issues/manifesto-2017/>

Sinn Féin: <https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/ManifestoWestminsterElection2017.pdf>

Remember: The General Election is 8 June. The deadline to register to vote has passed, but you can find out more about the candidates standing in your constituency here: <https://www.yourvotematters.co.uk/>

What do the manifestos say about science?

Conservatives

“Our long-term prosperity depends upon science, technology and innovation. The UK has an outstanding science base and many world-leading tech companies. We now need to go further. Our ambition is that the UK should be the most innovative country in the world.

At the last autumn statement, we announced a significant increase in government investment in research and development. We will deliver this and ensure further growth so that overall, as a nation, we meet the current OECD average for investment in R&D – that is, 2.4 per cent of GDP – within ten years, with a longer-term goal of three per cent. We will increase the number of scientists working in the UK and enable leading scientists from around the world to work here. We will work hard to ensure we have a regulatory environment that encourages innovation.

Our world-beating universities will lead the expansion of our R&D capacity. We must help them make a success of their discoveries – while they have a number of growing investment funds specialising in spin-outs, we have more to do to replicate the success of similar university funds in the United States.”

Labour

“Our country and its people have been held back by a lack of investment in the backbone of a modern economy – the infrastructure of transport, communications and energy systems. Labour will make different choices. We will take advantage of near record low interest rates to create a National Transformation Fund that will invest £250 billion over ten years in upgrading our economy.

We will create an innovation nation with the highest proportion of high skilled jobs in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development by 2030. We will meet the OECD target of 3 per cent of GDP spent on research and development by 2030. A Labour government will ensure that the UK maintains our leading research role by seeking to stay part of Horizon 2020 and its successor programmes and by welcoming research staff to the UK.”

Liberal Democrats

“In the knowledge-based economy of the future, scientific research, innovation and skills will be crucial to prosperity. We will protect the science budget, including the recent £2 billion increase, by continuing to raise it at least in line with inflation. Our long-term goal is to double innovation and research spending across the economy. We would guarantee to underwrite funding for British partners in EU-funded projects such as Horizon 2020 who would suffer from cancellation of income on Brexit.”

SNP

The SNP are supportive of science and research, and acknowledge the need to support research with government and industrial funding. The manifesto touches on areas of Scottish success in technology development and innovation, but these are mainly in the renewable energy and environmental fields.

SDLP

The SDLP aim to *“better [tap] the intellectual capacity within our health services to help develop life sciences and related industries... This is the surest way to grow the North’s economy.”*

Science funding and collaboration

Conservatives

The Conservatives state that the UK would continue to collaborate with the EU in science and innovation, and secure a smooth, orderly Brexit. They state that *“the days of Britain making vast annual contributions to the European Union would end”*, but that the UK would want to make financial contributions to specific European programmes that it wishes to participate in.

The Conservatives will spend more on research and development (2.4% of GDP within ten years, with a longer-term goal of 3%), *“to turn brilliant discoveries into practical products and transform the world’s industries – such as the batteries that will power a new generation of clean, efficient, electric vehicles.”* The Manifesto specifically mentions life sciences as one of Britain’s highly successful industries: *“Life sciences, for example, employs 175,000 people and many of the world’s top medicines have been developed in the UK. We will continue to support research into the diagnosis and treatment of rare cancers and other diseases.”*

They state they want Britain to maintain our position as the European hub for life sciences

Labour

Labour would ensure that the UK maintains its leading research role by seeking to remain a part of Horizon 2020 and its successor programmes, and by welcoming research staff to the UK. Labour would seek to retain membership of Euratom and the European Medicines Agency. It would also look to remain part of the Erasmus student exchange programme.

Labour will complete the Science Vale transport arc, from Oxford to Cambridge through Milton Keynes *“to harness the economic potential of new technologies and science.”*

They will invest in new public-health driven research and development to find effective and affordable treatments for diseases in the developing world, including fighting TB, malaria, HIV/AIDS and neglected tropical diseases.

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats will campaign against any reduction in investment in UK universities. They state that the Brexit vote has already started to affect existing and proposed research programmes, and will campaign against any reduction in investment in UK universities and for their right to apply for EU funds on equal terms. They will fight to retain access to Horizon 2020 and Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions funding.

They will protect the science budget, including the recent £2 billion increase, by continuing to raise it at least in line with inflation. They will double innovation and research spending across the economy, and would guarantee to underwrite funding for British partners in EU-funded projects such as Horizon 2020 who would suffer from cancellation of income on Brexit.

SNP

The SNP would work with Scotland’s universities and institutions to seek clarity from the UK government on what will replace EU funding from programmes such as Horizon 2020. They would seek Scottish representation on the UK Research and Innovation Board, which decides on allocation of UK research funding to UK universities.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin recognise the importance of EU funding for research, and would prioritise continued access to EU-wide research opportunities.

Migration

Conservatives

The manifesto states: *“With annual net migration standing at 273,000, immigration to Britain is still too high. It is our objective to reduce immigration to sustainable levels, by which we mean annual net migration in the tens of thousands, rather than the hundreds of thousands we have seen over the last two decades.”*

After leaving the European Union, the Conservatives would establish an immigration policy that allows for the reduction and control of the number of people who come to Britain from the EU, while still attracting the skilled workers the economy needs.

The Party would make it a Brexit negotiating priority for the 140,000 staff from EU countries can carry on making their vital contribution to our health and care system.

They state that their long term goal is to provide a technical education that *“Britain has lacked for decades”*. However, they say they will use the immigration system to address the immediate needs of key sectors. They will ask the independent Migration Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the government about how the visa system can become better aligned with our modern industrial strategy. They envisage that the committee’s advice will allow us to set aside significant numbers of visas for workers in strategically-important sectors without adding to net migration as a whole.

They also state that *“skilled immigration should not be a way for government or business to avoid their obligations to improve the skills of the British workforce”*. So they will double the Immigration Skills Charge levied on companies employing migrant workers, to £2,000 a year by the end of the parliament, using the revenue generated to invest in higher level skills training for workers in the UK.

They will:

- increase the earnings thresholds for people wishing to sponsor migrants for family visas.
- toughen the visa requirements for students
- expect students to leave the country at the end of their course, unless they meet new, higher requirements that allow them to work in Britain after their studies have concluded.
- overseas students will remain in the immigration

The Conservatives want the UK to maintain the Common Travel Area and maintain as frictionless a border as possible between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Labour

Labour said freedom of movement would end when the UK leaves the European Union and that it would offer fair rules and reasonable management on migration. They will replace income thresholds with a prohibition on recourse to public funds. New rules will be equally informed by negotiations with the EU and other partners, including the Commonwealth.

Labour would immediately guarantee existing rights for all EU nationals living in Britain and secure reciprocal rights for UK citizens who have chosen to make their lives in EU countries.

They will institute a new migration system which is based on our economic needs, balancing controls and existing entitlements. This may include employer sponsorship, work permits, visa regulations or a tailored mix of all these.

Labour *“welcomes international students who benefit and strengthen our education sector, generating more than £25 billion for the British economy and significantly boosting regional jobs and local businesses. They are not*

permanent residents and we will not include them in immigration numbers, but we will crack down on fake colleges.”

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats will press for the UK to unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU nationals in the UK, ending their ongoing uncertainty. The Party will call for the overhaul and simplification of the registration process for EU nationals to obtain UK citizenship.

The Liberal Democrats say that any Brexit deal must protect right to work, travel, study and retire across the EU. They will *“make UK is an attractive destination for overseas students”*. They will reinstate post-study work visas for graduates in STEM subjects who find suitable employment within six months of graduating, and give the devolved administrations the right to sponsor additional post-study work visas.

They would work with universities to ensure a fair and transparent student visa process and find ways to measure accurately the number of students leaving at the end of their course. They will establish a centrally funded Migration Impact Fund to help local communities to adjust to new migration.

SNP

Fundamentally, the SNP wants control of migration into Scotland devolved to the control of the Scottish Government. They would encourage immigration from EU and EEA nationals. They will *“stand firm against the demonisation of migrants.”*

They will campaign for the Immigration Skills Charge to be scrapped, and will oppose its extension to cover EU workers post-Brexit.

The SNP aims to reverse the restrictions on international students, and would call for the full reinstatement of the Post-Study Work Visa scheme. They also support the rights of UK students to move and study around Europe, and would aim to achieve the continuation of programmes like ERASMUS+.

SDLP

The SDLP aims to include traditional and newer communities in Northern Ireland’s future, and intends no EU citizen to lose the right to reside in Northern Ireland. They believe immigration enriches an area. People born in Northern Ireland can choose to be Irish citizens and thus retain EU access. The SDLP is campaigning to retain the benefits and rights this entails for the people of Northern Ireland.

Brexit negotiations

Conservatives

The Conservatives said that they stand by their approach laid out in the Brexit White Paper. They maintain that “*no deal is better than a bad deal*” and reaffirmed their commitment to pulling out of the single market and the customs union, adding that they will seek a “deep and special partnership including a comprehensive free trade and customs agreement.”

The Conservatives believe that negotiating the terms of Brexit should go alongside those on the future partnership and that the final agreement will be subject to a vote in both houses of Parliament.

Labour

Labour would scrap the Government's Brexit White Paper and replace it with fresh negotiating priorities. This would include a strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union.

Labour would reject “no deal” as a viable option and would negotiate transitional arrangements if needs be. Labour would look to work constructively with the EU and other European nations on issues such as climate change, the refugee crises, and counter-terrorism.

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats pledged to hold a referendum on the terms of any deal agreed between the UK and EU. The vote on any final deal would include an option of staying in the EU

The Liberal Democrats will campaign for Single Market and Customs Union memberships and support Freedom of Movement.

SNP

The SNP say they will “*ensure that the rights and protections currently safeguarded by EU membership are not diminished after the UK leaves.*” They note that the EU provides research funding, and say they will “*demand urgent clarity from the UK government on long-term funding arrangements after the UK leaves the EU, and ensure that current funding levels are matched.*”

The SNP aims to retain Scotland's place in the Single Market. They say there is “*no rational case for taking... the UK out of the Single Market.*”

SDLP

The SDLP calls for recognition of Northern Ireland as a special case in EU negotiations, meaning it could retain the Common Travel Area and thus treat the whole island of Ireland as part of the European Economic Area. They claim Northern Ireland can rejoin the EU without recourse to Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty. They note those born in Northern Ireland can choose to be citizens of an EU country and this citizenship will remain post-Brexit.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin call for a designated Special Status for Northern Ireland, as allowed by current constitutional arrangements, in order to retain Single Market and Customs Union access, as well as EU funding streams.

Higher education

Conservatives

The Conservatives have pledged to invest in Britain's technical education system, saying that *"we want British technical education to be as prestigious as our world leading higher education system, and for technical education in this country to rival the best technical systems in the world."* New institutes of technology, backed by leading employers and linked to leading universities, will be developed in every major city in England. They will provide courses at degree level and above, specialising in technical disciplines, such as STEM.

Universities hoping to charge maximum tuition fees will have to become involved in academy sponsorship or the founding of free schools.

Labour

Labour will reintroduce maintenance grants for university students, and will abolish university tuition fees. They state: *"Labour believes education should be free, and we will restore this principle. No one should be put off educating themselves for lack of money or through fear of debt."*

Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats would reinstate maintenance grants for the poorest students, to ensure *"that living costs are not a barrier to disadvantaged young people studying at university"*.

They would establish a review of higher education finance in the next parliament to consider any necessary reforms, in the light of the latest evidence of the impact of the existing financing system on access, participation and quality, and make sure there is no more retrospective raising of rates, or selling-off of loans to private companies.

They would reinstate quality assurance for universities applying for degree-awarding powers.

SNP

The SNP promises to *"guarantee the continuation of free university education in Scotland."* They do not give their position on tuition fees in England.

SDLP

The SDLP wishes to *"refocus support for third level education towards the STEM subjects and areas where graduates can add maximum immediate value to the economy."*

Tuition fee loans would be made available for part-time undergraduates, as well as all postgraduates. This would also be extended to anyone already possessing an undergraduate degree who wishes to reskill in a STEM subject.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin highlight that students wishing to study in the Republic of Ireland would face international-rate tuition fees post-Brexit. They support *"the movement of students across Europe"* as well as international recognition of qualifications. They also wish to remain participants in Erasmus+.