

Ten dynamic priorities for new election manifestos

The big issue question today is how will UK ‘survive and thrive’ in the tough global swimming race? Whilst NHJ has continued to warn that the eurozone faces major adjustment sooner or later, and that the British economy is still some years away from safety, we have consistently maintained that UK has the intellectual, innovation, and skills potential to do better than most other nations in the 21st century ‘sink or swim’ swimming race. We have the world’s pivotal global city and top financial centre, our culture and diversity of population are critical strengths, and in around 30 years time we take over from Germany as the most populous European nation.

In numerous articles we have covered our major weaknesses and risks, and it is by no means certain that UK will be amongst the front swimmers. However, we can achieve this and have a real opportunity to do very well if – and only if - we have the courage to be much bolder than of late. We very much reject the notion that UK should readjust to ordinary medium power role and status. Our collective experience across the world and the major international organisations confirms that others look to us to be thought and active leaders – primarily because it is in our nature and because we adapt to new circumstances at home and abroad better than most.

We must pull together around values and a culture that puts others and the wider community first - above the individual. Radical structural change of governance and government are necessary to deliver coherent outcomes across traditional vertical departmental structures. Our parliaments must become enablers and drivers of healthier relationships between citizen, government, and key institutions. We must stop being negative and reactive about Europe and instead give it the pragmatic leadership it craves.

Many will say that recent history demonstrates that we lack both the leadership and popular support to make really difficult policy changes and then deliver and execute radical change programmes. Our response to that is ‘sink or swim?’ The reason why active political engagement is at an all-time low is largely because of a lack of confidence in institutions locked into old ways of thinking and with just “muddling through”. Swimming, of course, requires much more forward propulsion than treading water. Can we summon the energetic and coordinated engagement of the whole body - leaders, electorate, and majority of citizens - to swim more and tread water less?

The scale and pace of world-wide change is accelerating and will be challenged by strong resistance on occasion. Nevertheless, we have no choice other than to commit to the very best mental and physical pre-race training and preparation regime.

These ten strategic change priorities would make a start to moving us up towards the front of the swimming pack.

Stating explicitly what we stand for

Values: putting people, community, and others, including next generations, first. This major cultural transformation must be inculcated formally from primary school stage, and include significant incentives for all ages to engage in some form of community service.

Changing the way Government operates

Restructure Whitehall to reflect outcomes: radical re-grading of senior cabinet posts. The Chancellor along with a new foreign and domestic security 'supremo' - one person with overall responsibility for foreign/overseas aid/defence & domestic security - combining 'hard' and 'soft' power security responsibilities - become deputy prime ministers. The next senior tier, in order, are: Business & Innovation; Education & Skills; Energy, Climate Change & Environment; Social Cohesion & The Vulnerable (a new 'supremo' covering welfare, communities, health); Regions & Local Government. The following traditional 'Secretarial' senior posts to be downgraded to 'Ministerial' rank: foreign, defence, DFID, Home Secretary, Health Secretary.

Reduce central government role and responsibilities: update the Act of Union to reflect the role of the four constituent nations, including more responsibilities for the regions, London 'City State', and rural communities. Re-define core 21st century national activities to irreducible top level direction, divesting most of health, education, and regional transport and infrastructure management to regional bodies. Stimulate excellence through freedom to experiment and move away from the existing rigid 'one size fits all' system – currently the most centralised of major European states - bureaucratic models.

Re-define the nature of the Welfare State – recognising its original intent: start to end central government role and funding of universal state pensions and benefits from current taxation; re-define and restrict 'universal/free' health service provision, establish non-central government structures and funding for burgeoning non-A&E and non-new core health services.

Creating visionary reform in key policy areas

Full employment for 16-30 year olds: guaranteed safety-net employment combining vocational training and individually tailored training and development programmes for all young people.

Education and Innovation: significantly raise the priorities and funding of these two drivers of future prosperity and security - with precedence over most other peacetime central government activities

Embed and incentivise a culture of universal community service: taught, experienced, and practised within the core curriculum from age 7-18; tailored incentives for all ages (e.g. students offset university loans/debt and tax breaks for all ages for set number of hours per month or days worked in the community per year).

Energy and Climate Change: produce 50% of UK energy from domestic sources by 2025 – and further incentivise non-carbon and renewable energy research and development with target of 80%+ self-sufficiency by 2035; UK to further increase research into climate and environment change and enhance its overall commitment as a responsible developed nation and global thought leader.

UK Leadership in Europe: produce a blueprint for ‘new model’ European Union - a leaner, fitter, and more democratically representative structure and headquarters, with the repatriation of various powers and a key role for national parliaments, Both European and UK national interests require UK to provide pivotal thought and active leadership in a ‘new model’ EU.

Defence & Security: improve the national ‘extremis’ and short notice general contingency capability: formalise a minimum Army manning level of 120,000 trained personnel, automatically increasing regular manpower as required if Army trained reserve manpower falls beneath 30,000; formalise ‘extremis reserve’ liability for police and other emergency services personnel after leaving regular employment akin to the armed forces Queen’s Order contingency scheme.