

## It's all about the talent

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### [Calling all students!](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on April 27, 2010

Up and down the country [students are rallying behind a NUS pledge against a rise in tuition fees](#) . So far it has been signed by over 1,000 MPs who promise to support the pledge if elected. Among those signed is Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrat MP Vince Cable and Government Minister of State, Phil Woolas.

The NUS believe that thus far, the student vote has been largely neglected by the main parties despite the fact that student numbers account for 10-30% of votes (equivalent to 45 seats). The BBC puts the number of students in Britain at 2million.

As such, student votes are highly likely to swing the election, if parties take steps to engage with this off-neglected calibre of voter.

According to a joint survey carried out by Endsleigh Insurance and the NUS, 75% of students are intending to vote, but two-thirds have yet to be swayed. Worryingly, these two-thirds (81%) noted that they had **not** been contacted by any of the political parties.

So it remains to be seen – how many students will actually turn out to vote? Given that their collective vote could mean the loss or gain of 45 seats, it is imperative that record numbers of students as possible exercise their democratic right. Because of course, it's all about strength in numbers.

#### **And Elsewhere...**

##### **The bad news**

Those candidates in the education sector may have been following the recent debates about 'free schools' which are causing rifts within the Conservative party. Plans put forward by the Conservatives involve giving public money to independents (parents, or in some cases, private companies) to create their own schools . Yet two senior Conservative figures warned yesterday that money used to create new schools would threaten existing schools whose budgets would have to be dramatically reduced to finance the new institutions. Since the story broke, one of the senior figures has since issued a clarification stating that he is "[100% behind the new plans](#) . Although it remains to be seen how this can be possible due to his concerns voiced earlier.

##### **The Good News**

London candidates may be interested to note that the [East London line opens to the public today](#) , as part of the London Overground network. Set to run from New Cross Gate to Dalston Junction (one of the new stations created for the network), there will be up to eight trains an hour, which will be good news for commuters who have had to tackle daily street-level traffic jams in the months leading up to the grand

opening.

This is the first part of the £1bn extension which was initiated by Former Mayor Ken Livingstone and the Labour Government.

Part II will see the East London Line extended to Highbury & Islington – expected to open in Spring 2011 – and Part III will see the line further extended to Clapham Junction, ready for opening in 2012, in time for the Olympics.

[The new trains](#) have no doors separating the carriages, allowing passengers to walk the length of the train (which will be benefit during the daily commuter ‘squash’) and feature air conditioning, disabled access and extra wide gangways.

And if you’re an ultra-keen train enthusiast you can even [take a virtual trip](#) \* on the new train from the comfort of your home.

*\*Small video clip near the bottom of the news page*

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## [Fancy a senior-level job in central government?](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on April 20, 2010

If you have been searching for jobs on our main [Jobsgopublic](#) site recently, you may have come across a rather prestigious vacancy for the most senior role in the country. Unlike many senior levels, this vacancy is unusual in that it is open to all candidates.

*Why not apply?*

Here is your chance to do things your way, if successful. As well as implementing policies, statutes and Bills, you will have the unique opportunity to work closely with Britain’s favourite international partners in the Middle East (Israel, Iraq, Lebanon etc.) as well as the US and parts of Asia. Candidates will be expected to have PR experience (although not essential, as on-the-job training will be offered) and financial management experience is not necessary. Although you would be one of the most despised people in Britain and you could be subjected to numerous impersonations on *Rory Bremner* et al, you would benefit from a variety of perks and benefits if recruited:

- A generous six-figure salary (subject to increase, as required)
- As many tax-free country estates as needed (can include a [duck island](#) and private lake, complete with pedigree mallards, if really desired)
- VIP tickets to any event, anywhere
- A live-in team of cooks, valets, personal assistants and make-up artists
- PLUS: A sturdy Nokia phone (to [throw at anyone of your choice](#) ), a personal chauffeur, exclusive use of a private jet and a clothing allowance

So, what are you waiting for? Make sure the most important thing you do today is to [apply for the position](#). In politics, anything is possible.

We believe there are people out there who should be ‘put forward’ for the role, and probably do a better job

for the country and from the response's so far, so do you!

We hope you enjoy 'our take' on Running the Country.

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## **[Register to vote!](#)**

Posted by *AnnieM* on April 19, 2010

Today is the last day to [register to vote](#) . Don't forget!

- If you've ever complained about 'unreliable' British transport
- If you've ever used an NHS service
- If you've looked at school league tables
- If you've ever contacted your local council
- If you've ever voiced an opinion about overseas international relations
- If you've ever consciously purchased a fair-trade product
- If you've stopped using the car as much
- If you've ever disagreed with a politician
- If you've ever read the news
- If you ever wished there were more jobs
- If you ever wished there was more financial support for the vulnerable
- If you've ever complained about a local or national issue
- If you've ever wished things were different...

then you MUST register to vote!

It is our democratic right. A right people (especially women) have fought for centuries to obtain. A right people in many other countries are deprived of.

It is a chance to have our say - via a small cross on a ballot paper – on how we want Britain to be run. Whoever you choose to vote for, make sure you have your say. Your voice will be heard.

Don't let your chance slip away. [Register today](#).

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## **[Compulsory English language tests for new migrant workers](#)**

Posted by *AnnieM* on April 14, 2010

Under new government plans, [public sector workers who speak English as a second language](#) will be required to develop a higher standard of English before they can be employed in the sector. It will mean that migrant workers will have to take harder English tests to ensure their language level is proficient.

In their 2010 [Election Manifesto](#) , the current Labour Government says:

“We know that migrants who are fluent in English are more likely to work and find it easier to integrate. So as  
<http://blog.jobsgopublic.com/2010/04/>

well as making our English tests harder, we will ensure it is taken by all applicants before they arrive... Many public sector workers are already required to meet minimum standards of English; we will build on this to ensure that all employees who have contact with the public possess an appropriate level of English language competence.”

These manifesto pledges, deemed controversial by some and ‘hypocritical’ by others seem to have stoked up outrage on both sides.

Whilst a logical move in some ways (communication skills are essential in almost any job, after all) it falls short of actual success due to the lack of funding available for English language courses. Without the implementation of such services, enforcing the ‘proficient standard of English’ rule would leave many migrants worse off, without the means of finding work.

Clearly, it does not make economic sense to employ a non-English-speaking candidate in a public-facing role. But equally, it does not make sense to enforce a rule without providing the means to meet the new criteria. Learning a new language is no easy feat: if there is no relevant support available, how will any newly-arrived worker find work in the sector?

Yet many people are of the opinion that this measure is ‘too little too late’ and view it as further evidence that the Government are being ‘soft on the immigration’.

Whatever your view and background, one thing is certain: good communication goes hand in hand with excellent service delivery. At a time when critique of public sector delivery has never been out of the news for more than a few hours, it is essential that frontline public sector employees are able to communicate fluently with the general public. It should be about *how* they achieve this level of fluency, not *if* they should.

As this is such an important issue affecting huge numbers of people, we’d like to open this out to our diverse candidate base. What are *your* thoughts on this?

For more information:

[English language courses in the UK](#)

- Posted in [Diversity and equality](#), [Public sector updates](#), [Skills](#), [Workplace issues](#)
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## [\*\*Absenteeism: a public sector trait?\*\*](#)

Posted by *AnnieM* on April 06, 2010

With the introduction of the ‘fit note’ this April (which replaces the sick note) there is widespread speculation about the amount of time employees are taking as sick. Yet, many are expressing concern that the ‘fit note’ will force genuinely unwell people back into work before they are ready and encourage a culture of ‘presenteeism’ already prevalent across the public and private sectors. ‘Presenteeism’ is the opposite of ‘absenteeism’ whereby an employee returns to work despite physical or mental illness. Returning to work before an employee is fully recovered can result in prolonged illness and decreased productivity.

### **The bad news**

At present, there seems to be two schools of thought prevalent in the media. The BBC Magazine reports a study carried out by the CIPD which reveals that public sector employees take 9.7 sick days per year,

compared to the private sector average of 6.4 sick days per employee[1]. The Daily Mail cites NHS employees to take an average of 10.7 sick days per year and local government employees to take 13.5 sick days per year[2].

Yet according to Trades Union Congress, statistics from a study last month reveal the exact opposite. According to the March 2010 survey, 21% of public sector workers have worked through their illness rather than calling in sick. Compare this with 69% of private sector employees who take short-term absence due to minor ailments. TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber believes that public sector workers are much more likely to go to work during illness when they should actually be at home[3].

With conflicting statistics such as these, it is difficult to ascertain the reality of the situation. One thing is certain: those not familiar with public sector culture can often misinterpret statistics, particularly around absence and sick leave, whereby there are often strict procedures in place to ensure that staff do not return to work until they are fully recovered. Presenteeism is not *as* prevalent in the public sector (although statistics indicate that it does still exist although not to the same extent), purely because those working in front line services such as the emergency services are more likely to make graver mistakes if they return to work before they are well.

### The good news

At last, the long-awaited (and long-predicted) date of the general election has today been confirmed to take place on May 6<sup>th</sup>. The next few weeks in the lead up to the election will certainly be interesting, particularly for the public sector.

Perhaps in anticipation of this, Communities Secretary John Denham announced just days before confirmation of the election date that ten greater Manchester councils would together form the country's first ever combined authority. The councils: Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan will create a 'City Region' which will devolve power from Whitehall and cover issues such as housing, regeneration and transport. It is hoped that Greater Manchester residents will have a bigger say in local issues as the new authority will have much more power to initiate improvements and better services in the region.

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[1] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/8594866.stm>

[2] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1261333/Drive-employee-absenteeism-giving-workers-free-cars.html>

[3] [http://www.tuc.org.uk/h\\_and\\_s/tuc-17790-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-17790-f0.cfm)

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