

# Education: what our politicians think

MPs Winter Survey – Nov/Dec 2014

Key Influencer Tracking

Report prepared for Communications Management

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February 2015



Methodology



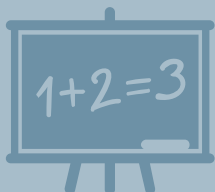
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# Methodology

# Methodology




This report presents findings from the winter 2014 wave of Ipsos MORI’s Members of Parliament survey, part of Ipsos MORI’s programme of regular multi-sponsored studies among key audiences.



## Sample

An initial sample of **343** MPs were contacted and quotas on ministerial status within party were set to ensure those interviewed closely represent the profile of the House of Commons

This resulted in **107** interviews in total:

Base	107
	47
	47
	11
Other	2



## Fieldwork Dates

Fieldwork dates:  
**4 November – 19 December 2014**

All data was collected through face to face interviews with MPs at their Westminster offices



## Interpretation

Sometimes the percentage result for ‘All MPs’ may be greater than the sum of Labour and Conservative MPs, as it includes results from other parties. Where results do not sum to 100%, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses, or the exclusion of ‘don’t know’ categories.

Data have been weighted to reflect the true balance by party and ministerial or spokesperson position

# Composition of Sample (%)

Structure of the house<sup>1</sup>



Weighted sample <sup>2</sup>



Unweighted sample



Footnote: 1. Population of House of Commons excluding N.I. MPs and Speaker (631),  
2) Data weighted by status (minister/backbencher) within party. All results in this report are weighted results  
Base: All MPs (107), Conservative MPs (47), Labour MPs (47), Lib Dem MPs (11), Other MPs (2), November-December 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI



# Executive summary and implications

# Executive summary and implications - 1

## Bridging the gap between education and the world of work essential for MPs

- MPs believe the current education system often leaves people poorly-equipped for the world of work; one-third (34%) want to see more work to support the training and development of skills. Politicians see a disconnect between the people that educational establishments produce and what the economy wants. They believe this to be a key reason for high immigration numbers – immigrants have the practical skills that not enough of the general population have. This aligns with MPs' opinions on the most important issues facing British business and industry today; almost half (49%) of all MPs give the skills shortage as the most important issue.
- As a result MPs would like to see a closer link between business and education providers to ensure programmes are tailored to meet employment needs. Two-fifths (40%) of MPs say they would like to see employers given more influence over how universities are run and programmes taught and one-third (29%) would like to see more investment in vocational training courses.
- Apprenticeships are seen as particularly beneficial in preparing students for the world of work and one-third (34%) of MPs would like to increase the number and standard of apprenticeships available. Many mention the need to raise the status of vocational training so they are considered as on par with a university education; *"there is a snobbery which has come in over the last 20 years where you are seen as a very second class citizen if you want to learn a skill...the government needs to encourage more social acceptance of the value of doing vocational training"* (Conservative backbencher).
- All this implies a drive towards stronger connections between education providers and business in the future.

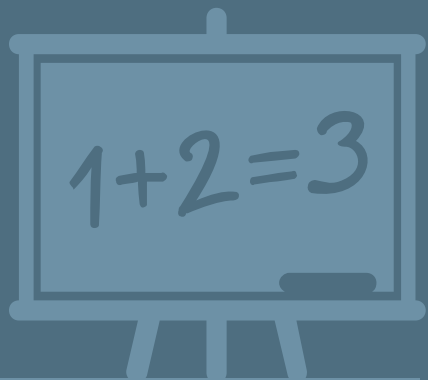
# Executive summary and implications - 2

## Investment in quality teachers priority for MPs

- MPs see high-quality teaching staff as essential to the development of a high standard education system. Almost half (49%) of MPs say they would invest more in school leadership development if they had free reign over education policy and one-fifth (21%) would like to see standards for entry into teacher training programmes raised; *“the quality of the teacher is by far the biggest single influence on the quality of education, and therefore you should be prepared to raise the status of the teaching profession, to pay more for good teachers, and to make sure the teachers we have got come from a diversity of backgrounds”* (Conservative backbencher).
- Two-fifths (42%) say they would like to see the status of the teaching profession raised in order to attract high-quality, highly-skilled candidates to the profession; *“[I would invest] to improve the quality of the teaching profession, the esteem of the teaching profession, so the brightest graduates are attracted to teaching rather than financial services or the civil service which is normal in many other countries”* (Liberal Democrat minister).
- Few MPs give specific examples of how this could be achieved, although raising standards for entry to teacher training programmes is mentioned by a number of MPs.

## Divisions over university fees

- The issue of university fees sees MPs heavily divided. While one-third (32%) of MPs say they would reduce tuition fees, topline figures hide significant party differences. Three-fifths (61%) of Labour MPs say they would reduce tuition fees compared to just 4% of their Conservative counterparts.
- Furthermore one-fifth (20%) of Labour MPs say they would scrap tuition fees entirely whilst a third (33%) of Conservative MPs would like to see the cap on tuition fees removed and universities allowed to charge what they want.
- All this leaves the future shape of university education undecided in the run up to this year's general election.



# School policy

More investment in high-quality teachers  
priority for MPs

# School policy

## Personnel development top priority across the political spectrum

- Personnel development is considered important for improving schools across the political spectrum. Almost half of all MPs (49%) say investment in the development of school leadership is necessary, whilst one-fifth (22%) give this as their top priority. This is common to both Conservative and Labour MPs, over half (51% and 53% respectively) of which want to see more investment in school leadership development.
- Two-fifths of all MPs (41%) want to see the status of the teaching profession raised in order to encourage more highly-skilled high-quality people into the profession. To ensure this one-fifth (21%) want to see standards for entry into teacher training programmes elevated *“so the brightest graduates are attracted to teaching rather than the financial services or the civil service”* (Liberal Democrat minister).
- However, whilst MPs are united on the need to prioritise improving the quality and standard of teaching in schools, there are significant differences of opinion between the Conservative and Labour parties on other areas in need of improvement. Two-fifths (39%) of Conservative MPs say they want to see greater autonomy for schools compared to just 6% of their Labour counterparts. This implies a more hands-off approach to education policy under a future Conservative-led government. This is, however, perhaps unsurprising given the Conservative party's support for the Academies and Free Schools programme and their historic support for Grammar Schools.
- Furthermore one-third (33%) of Conservative MPs want to concentrate on encouraging teachers from a greater variety of professional backgrounds into the profession whereas just 4% of Labour MPs see this as a priority; *“we need to draw people into the teaching profession who have experience of the outside world, that is what school is about, preparing people for the outside world”* (Conservative backbencher).
- In contrast, one-third (31%) of Labour MPs say the teaching profession needs greater involvement in the development of the national curriculum compared to just 2% of their Conservative counterparts.

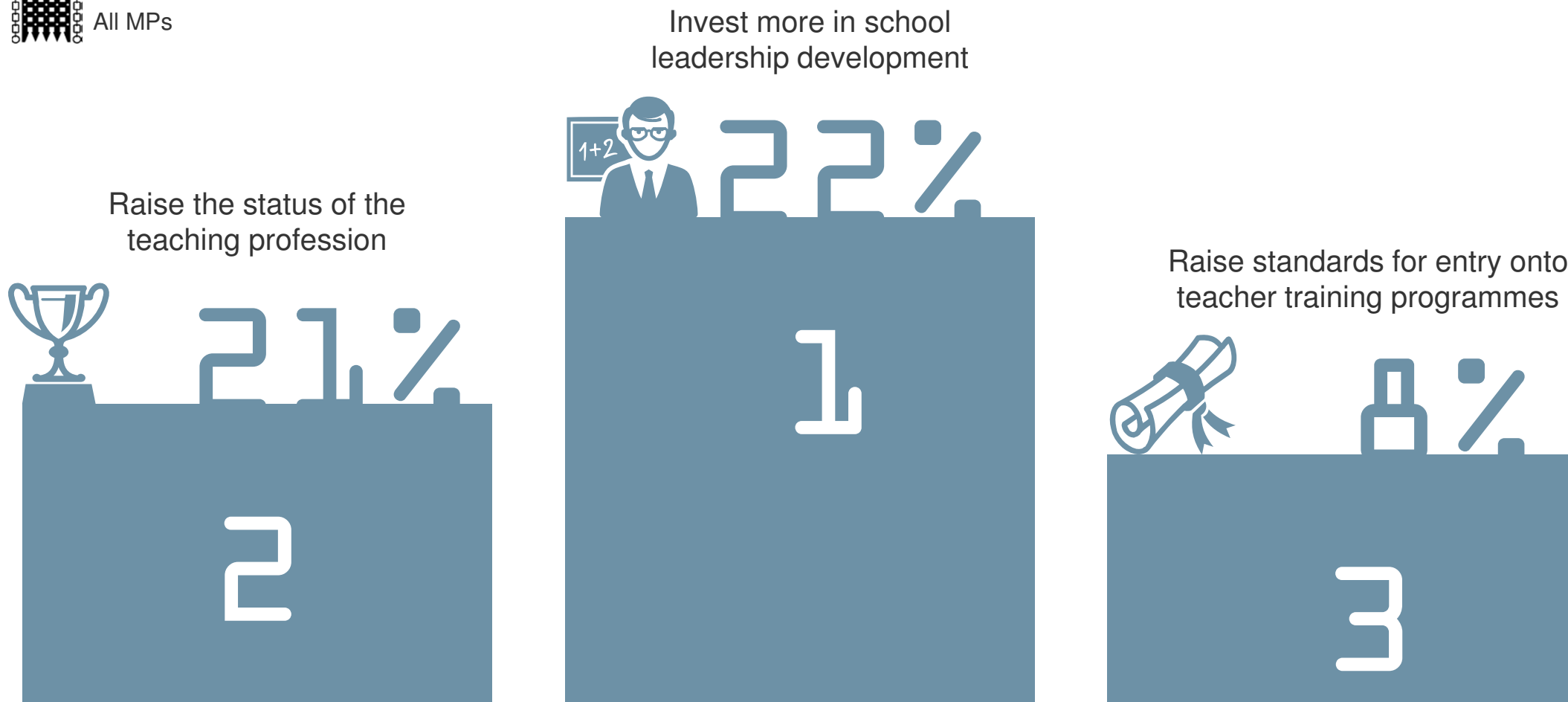
# Policy changes to improve schools – first mentions

If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve schools?

Top three mentioned first



All MPs



Base: All MPs (107), November-December 2014

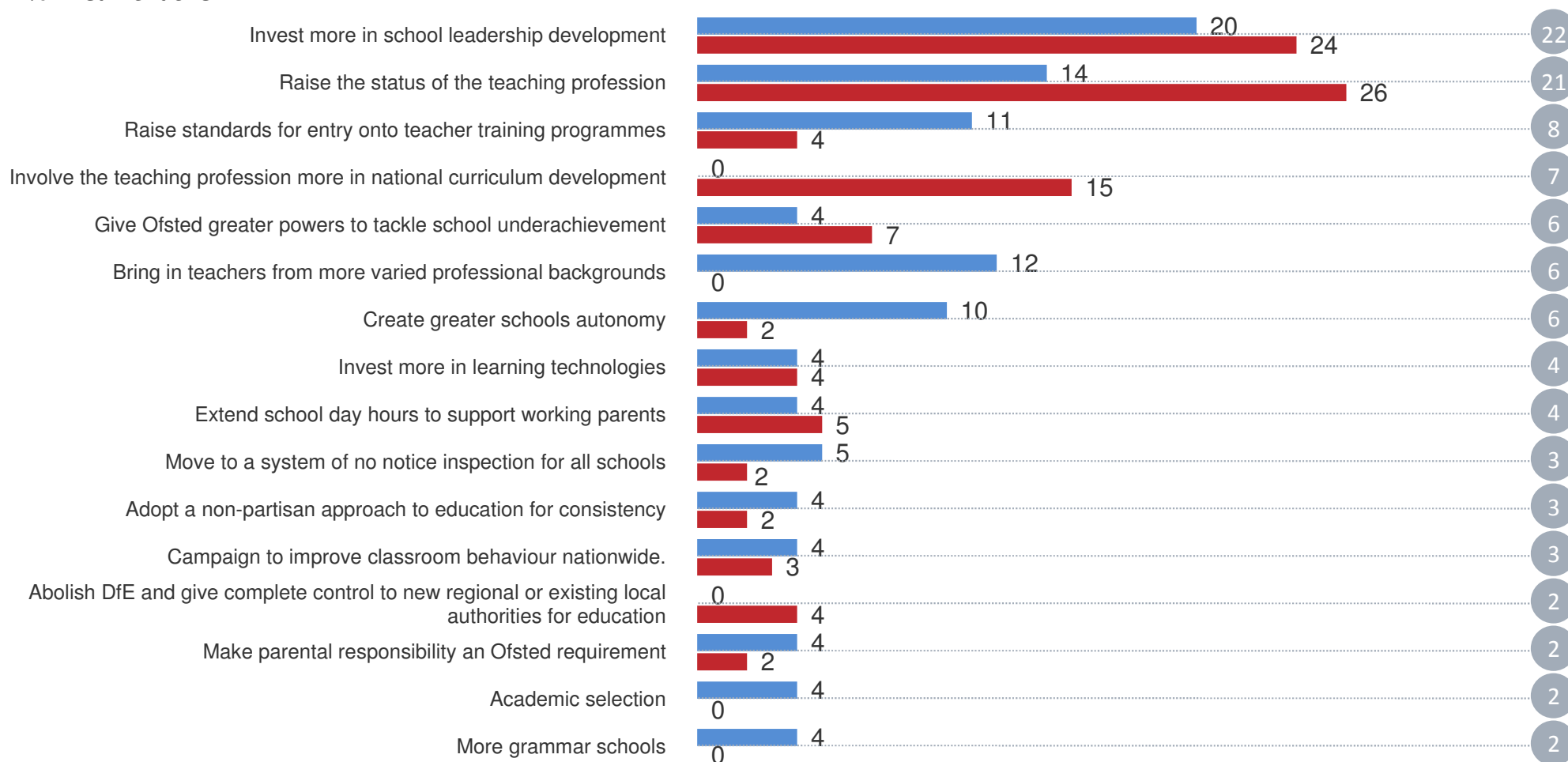
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If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve schools?

■ Conservative MPs ■ Labour MPs

% All MPs

% First mentions



Base: All MPs (107), Conservative MPs (47), Labour MPs (47) asked, November-December 2014

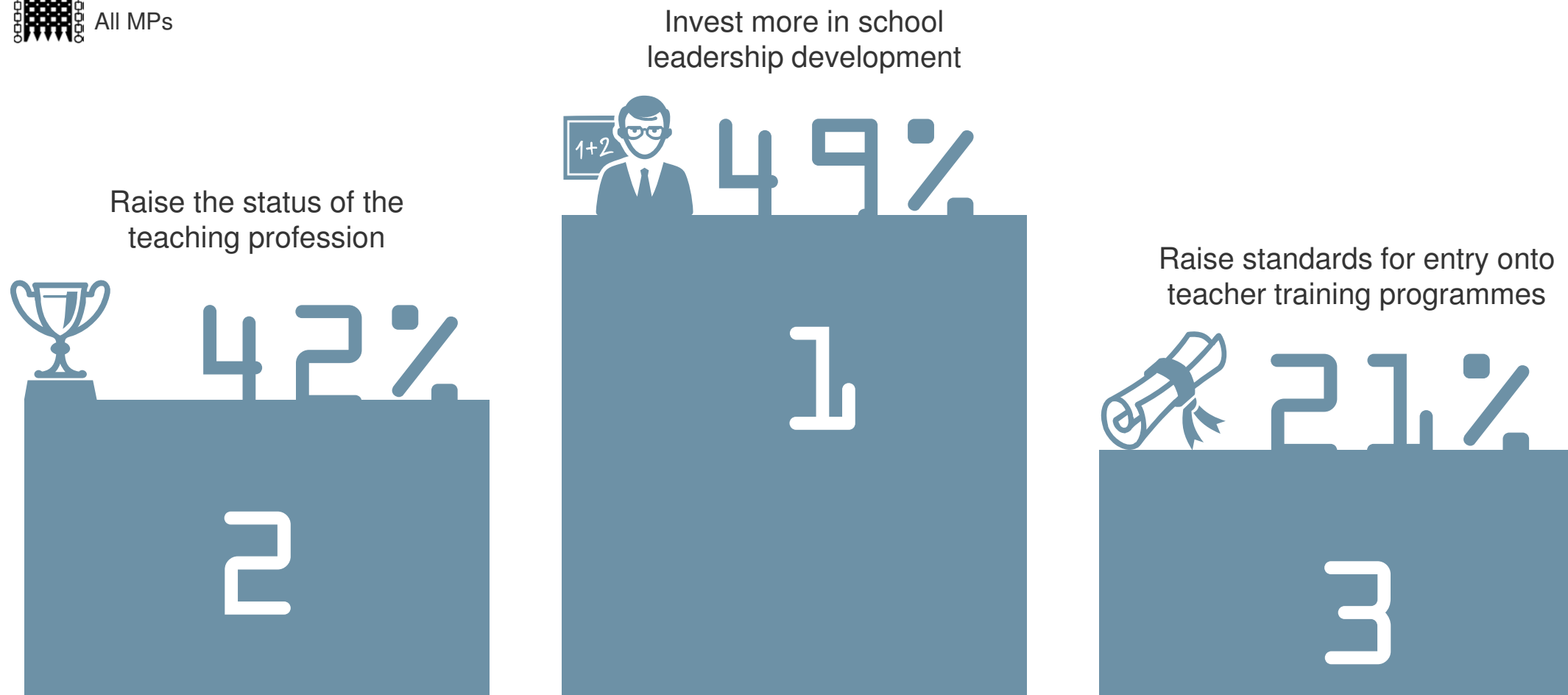
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If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve schools?

Top three – all mentions



All MPs



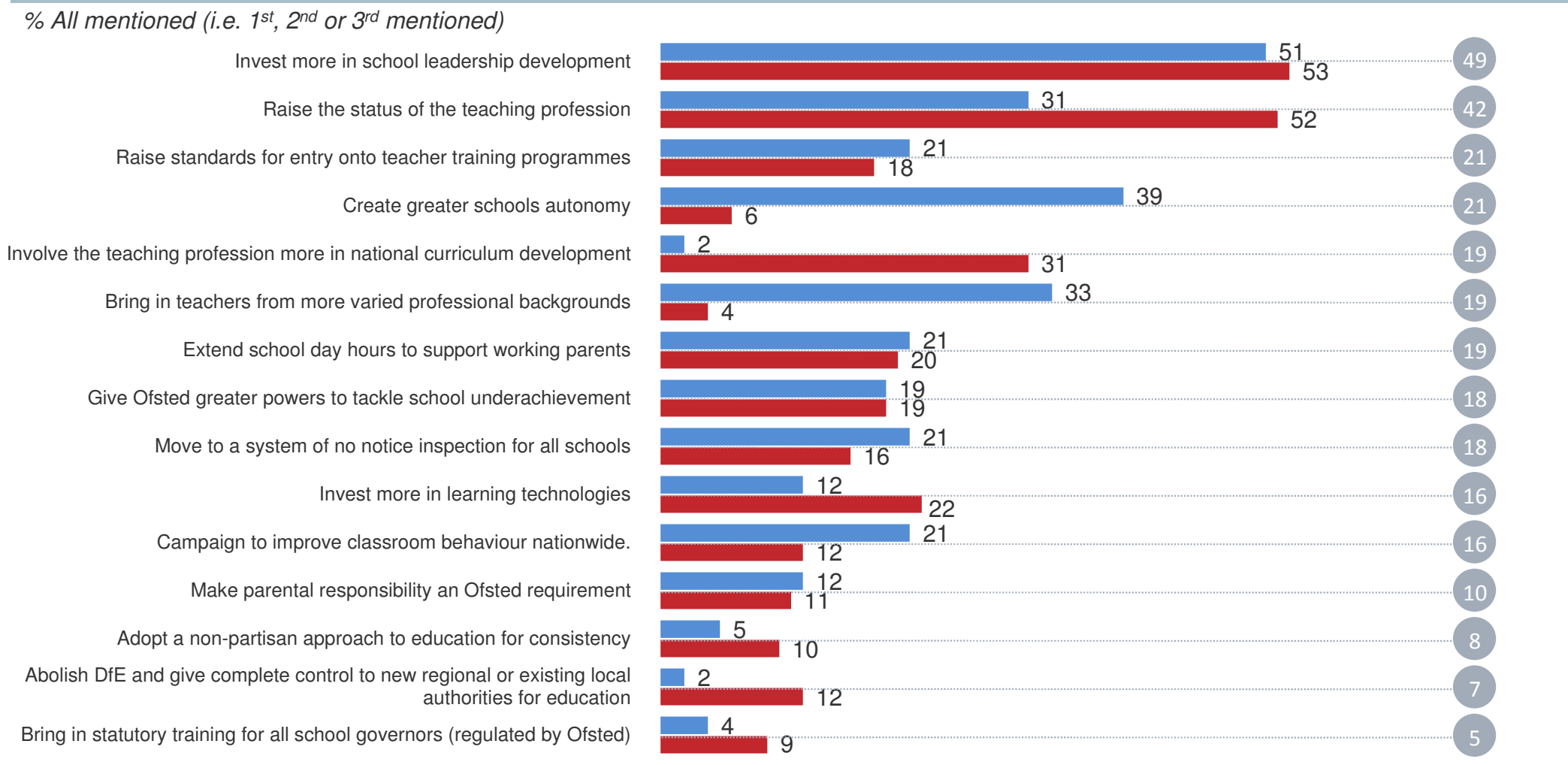
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■ Conservative MPs ■ Labour MPs

% All MPs



Base: All MPs (107), Conservative MPs (47), Labour MPs (47) asked, November-December 2014



# University policy

Investment in research a cross-party priority but divisions exist on fees and international students

# Policy changes to improve universities

## Investment in research a cross-party priority but divisions exist over fees and international students

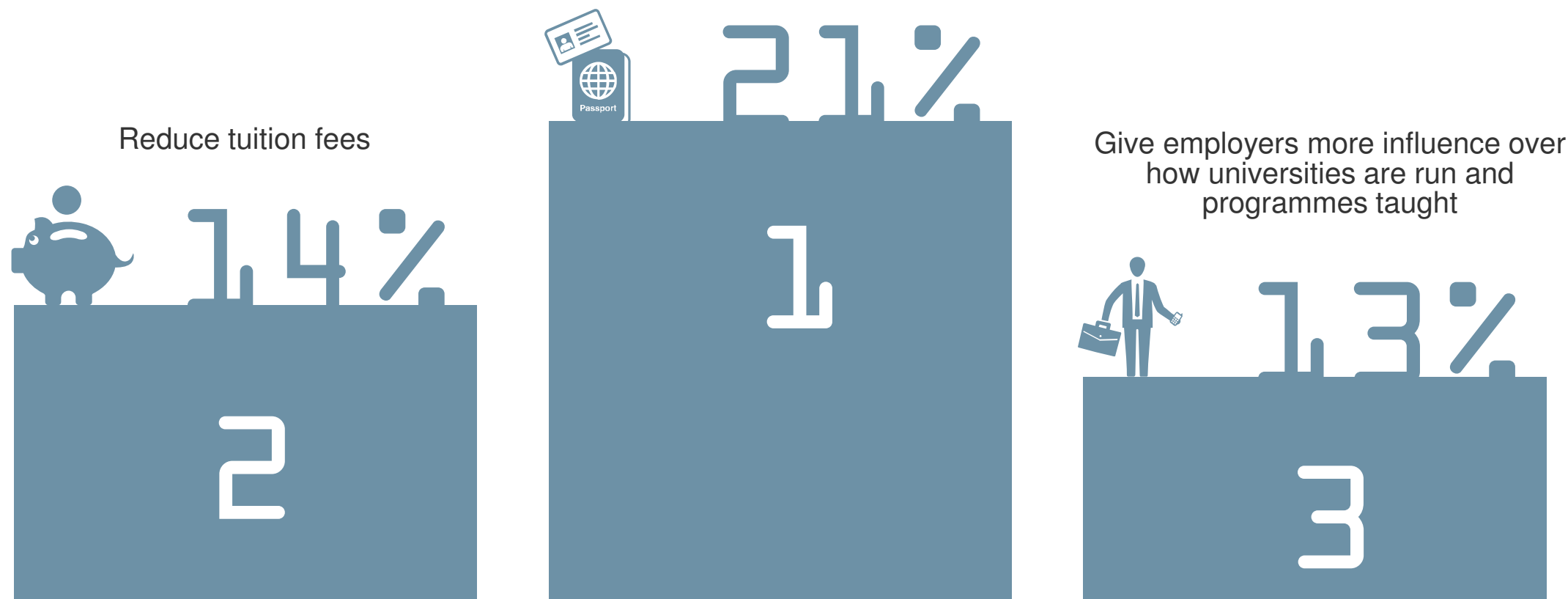
- Over half (57%) of MPs say greater investment in university research programmes is essential for improving the quality and standard of British universities; *“[I would invest in] blue sky research at universities – the UK has a really strong track record of invention and we need to continue turning knowledge into products and services”* (Labour backbencher).
- However all-party data hides significant party divisions. Whilst MPs largely agree on the need to invest more in university research programmes (52% and 59% of Conservative and Labour MPs respectively say this is important), they are divided on other areas in need of improvement. Whereas three-fifths (64%) of Labour MPs would like to see international students removed from the immigration numbers, just one-third (33%) of Conservative MPs would do so.
- Controlling tuition fees is important for Labour MPs; three-fifths (61%) of Labour MPs say they would reduce tuition fees, and one-quarter (27%) give this as their number one priority. Furthermore 20% would scrap tuition fees entirely and create free higher education. This differs significantly from Conservative MPs, only 4% of which say they would reduce tuition fees and one-third (33%) of which say they would like to see the cap on tuition fees removed and universities allowed to charge what they want.
- Of greater significance for Conservative MPs is allowing more flexibility to higher education providers; three-fifths (58%) of Conservative MPs say they would do this. Only 2% of Labour MPs mention this as important.
- Conservative MPs would also like to see employers afforded more influence over how universities are run and which programmes are taught in order to better prepare graduates for the world of work; *“I would be looking to join up the system more so that the skills employees needed were more readily taught”* (Conservative backbencher). Just over half (52%) of Conservative MPs mention this, with 18% giving it as their number one priority. In contrast only one-third (31%) of Labour MPs mention it.

# Policy changes to improve universities – first mentions

If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve universities?

Top three mentioned first

- = Invest more in university research programmes
- = Remove international students from the immigration numbers



Base: All MPs (106), November-December 2014

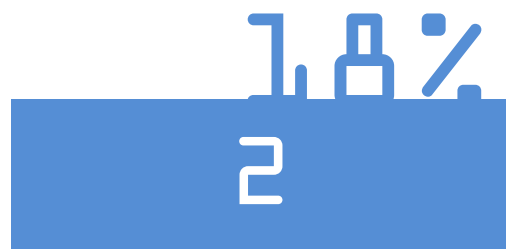
# Policy changes to improve universities – first mentions

If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve universities? (Top three mentions)

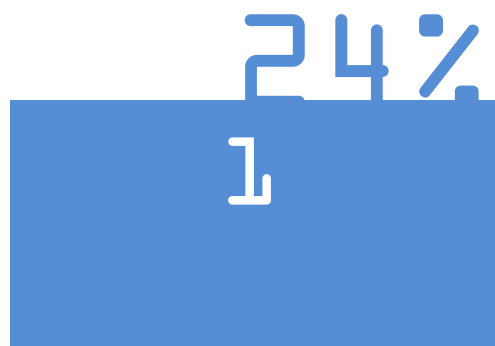


Conservative MPs

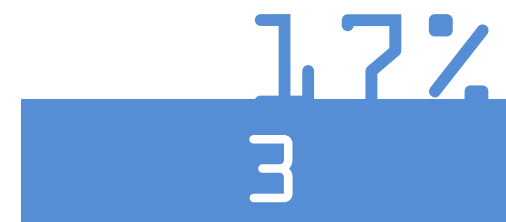
Give employers more influence over how universities are run and programmes taught



Invest more in university research programmes



= Remove international students from the immigration numbers  
= Allow more flexibility for private higher education providers

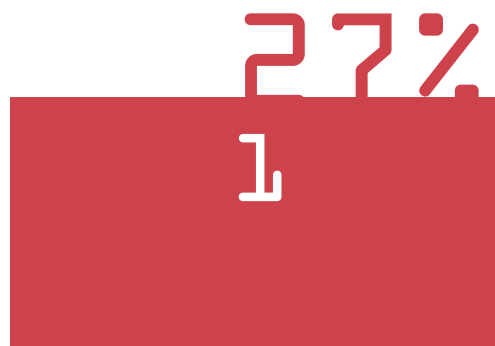


Labour MPs

Remove international students from the immigration numbers



Reduce tuition fees



Invest more in university research programmes



Base: Conservative MPs (46), Labour MPs (47), November-December 2014

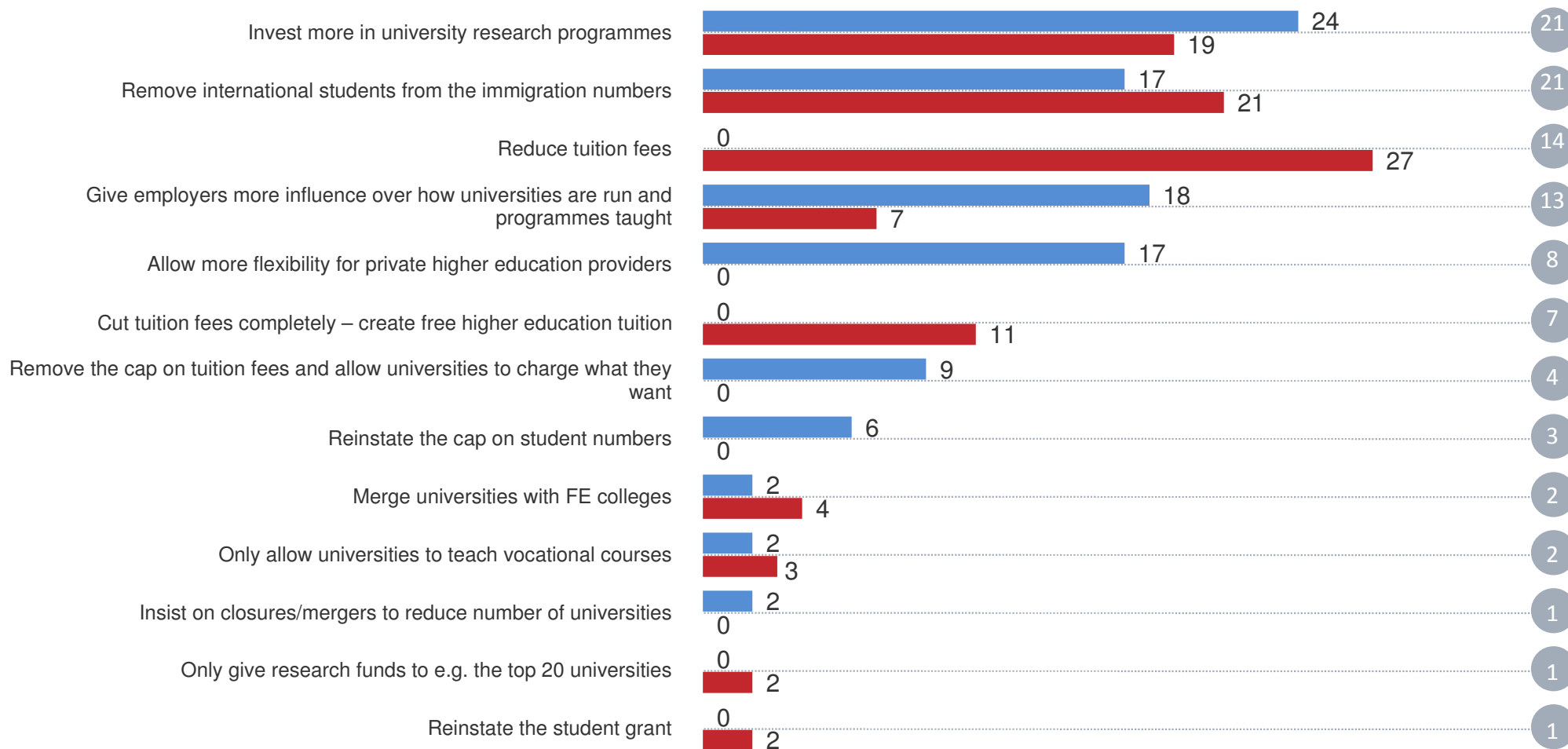
# Policy changes to improve universities – first mentions

If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve universities?

■ Conservative MPs ■ Labour MPs

% All MPs

% First mentions

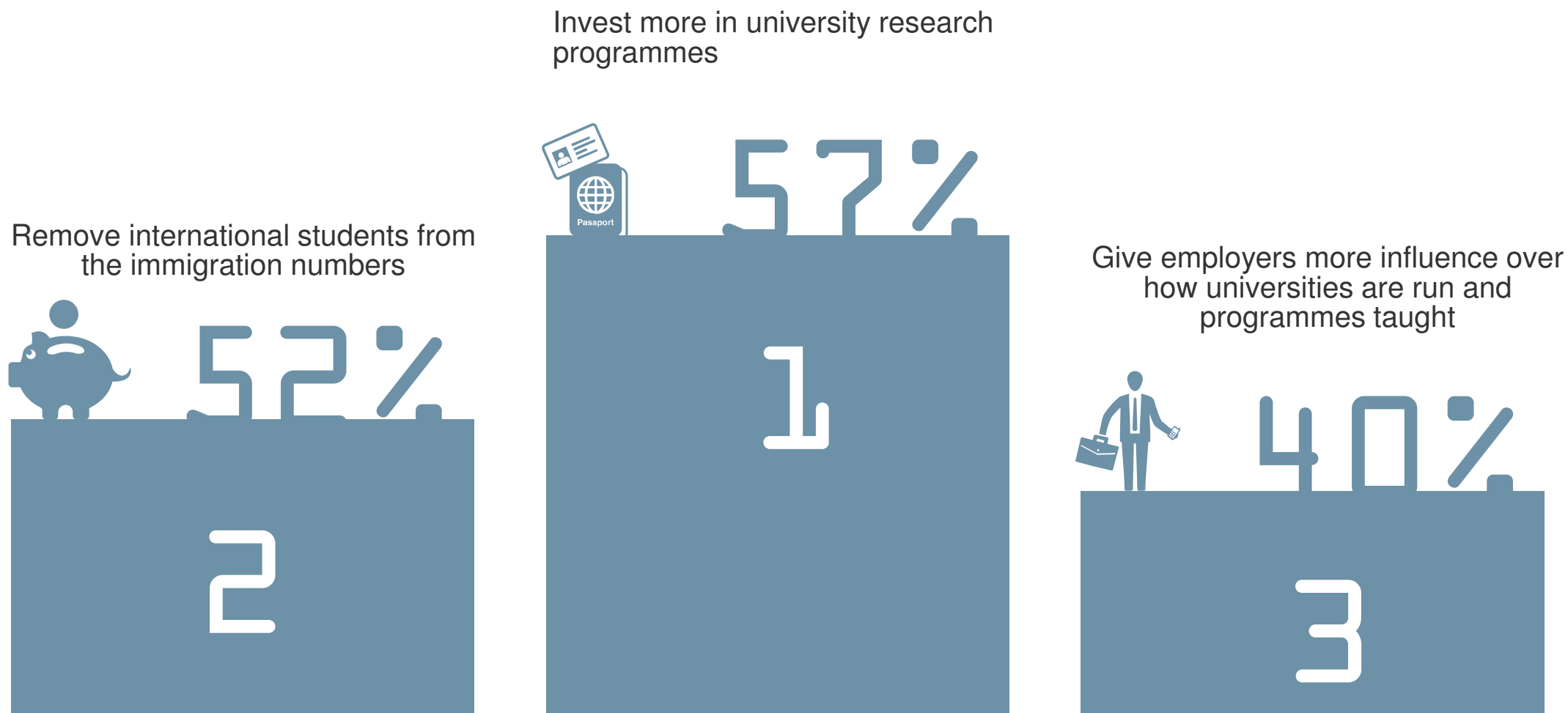


Base: All MPs (106), Conservative MPs (46), Labour MPs (47) asked, November-December 2014

# Policy changes to improve universities – all mentions

If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve universities?

Top three – all mentions



Base: All MPs (106), November-December 2014

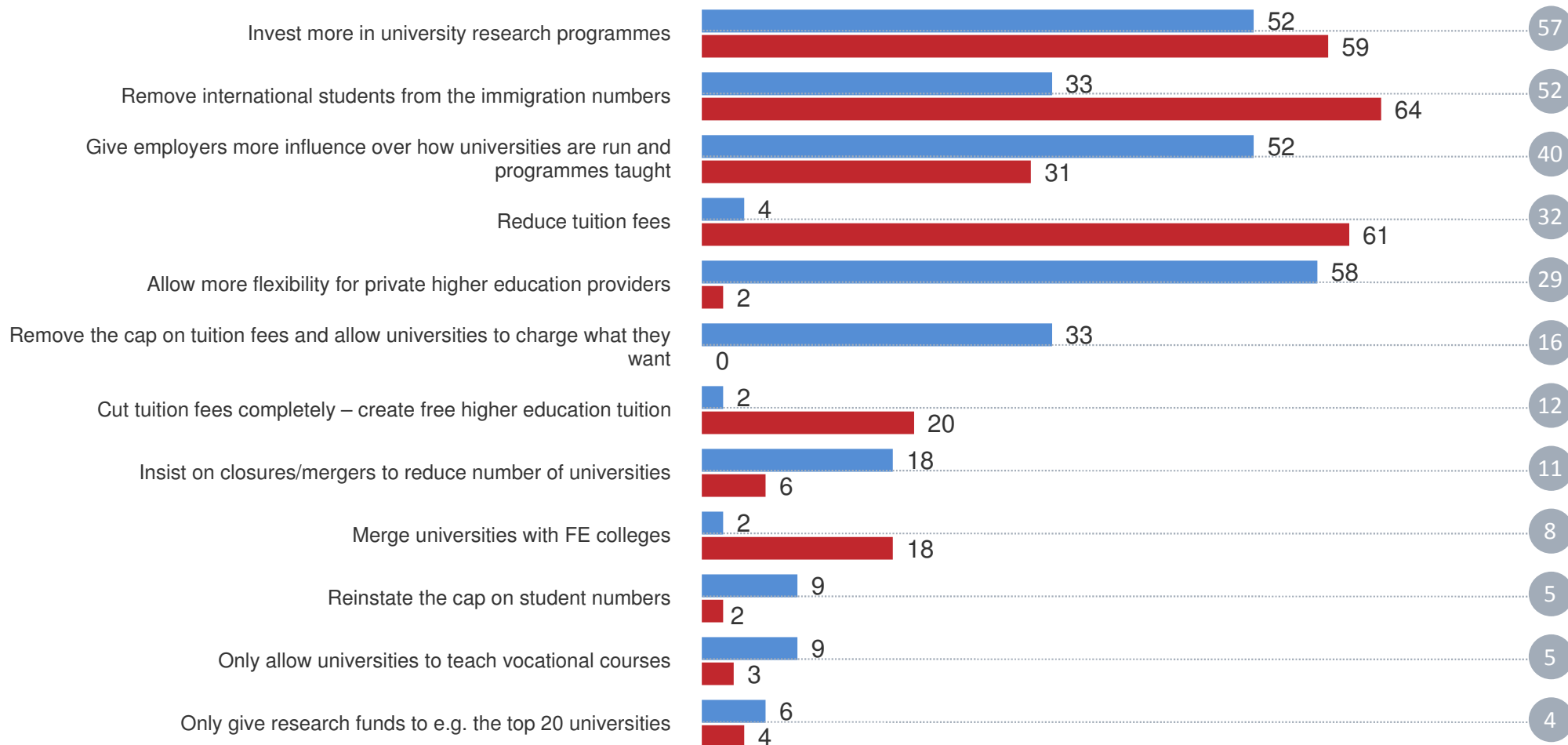
# Policy changes to improve universities – all mentions

If you had free reign over education policy, which, if any, of the following would you do to help improve universities?

■ Conservative MPs ■ Labour MPs

% All MPs

% All mentioned (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> mentioned)



Base: All MPs (106), Conservative MPs (46), Labour MPs (47) asked, November-December 2014



# Education and Britain's position in the world

A better link between education and  
the world of work a priority for MPs

# Education and Britain's position in the world

## Investment in teachers and skills crucial

- Following on from a focus on personnel development in future schools policy, two-fifths (37%) of all MPs say they would invest money in raising the standard and quality of teaching in schools to improve Britain's position in the world economy. This rises to nearly one-half (45%) amongst Conservative MPs who say that standards for entry into teacher training courses need to be raised; *"we have a legacy of teachers...who lack a sufficient level of expertise in the subjects they teach and who were themselves are only just finding their way into universities. We need more high-quality teachers"*. Conservative MPs would also like to see more people from a variety of professional backgrounds entering the teaching profession to provide students with a better understanding of the world of work. By and large Labour MPs agree, with almost one-third (31%) saying they would invest in higher standards and quality of teaching in schools.
- Creating better links between the world of work and education is emphasised by both parties. Almost half (46%) of all MPs believe the most important issue facing British business and industry today is a skills shortage and as such MPs value the vocational skills provided by apprenticeships; 34% say they would invest more in raising the standard and status of apprenticeship schemes; *"too many people think that if they don't go to university they have somehow failed – I would like to see apprenticeships and other vocational education be regarded at the same level as university"* (Conservative backbencher).
- Following on from this one-third (34%) of MPs would invest money to help bridge skills gaps, with almost half (44%) of Labour MPs saying they would invest money here. MPs believe closer collaboration between employers and the education sector is needed to ensure people develop the skills they need to do their jobs well; *"the two operate in silos...we have to find ways and means of forcing a proper relationship between schools and companies"* (Labour backbencher). MPs say a skilled workforce is essential to improving Britain's economic offering.
- Investment in early years education will reap economic benefits later on according to Labour MPs, over a third (35%) of whom say they would invest money in primary and pre-school education. MPs worry that a focus of spending on universities and schools catches some children too late and leaves them poorly equipped for the world of work; *"if a student can't read and write properly by the time they get to secondary school they are not going to make it"* (Labour shadow minister); *"studies show that where you get the greatest return to society and the economy is by investing in the early years of development"* (Labour shadow minister). This is less important for Conservative MPs, although a quarter (22%) still mention it.
- Of low importance for MPs is investment in school buildings and technology. What comes through clearly is a belief that Britain needs to develop a high-quality education system that directly feeds into the world of work in order to improve its position in the world economy.

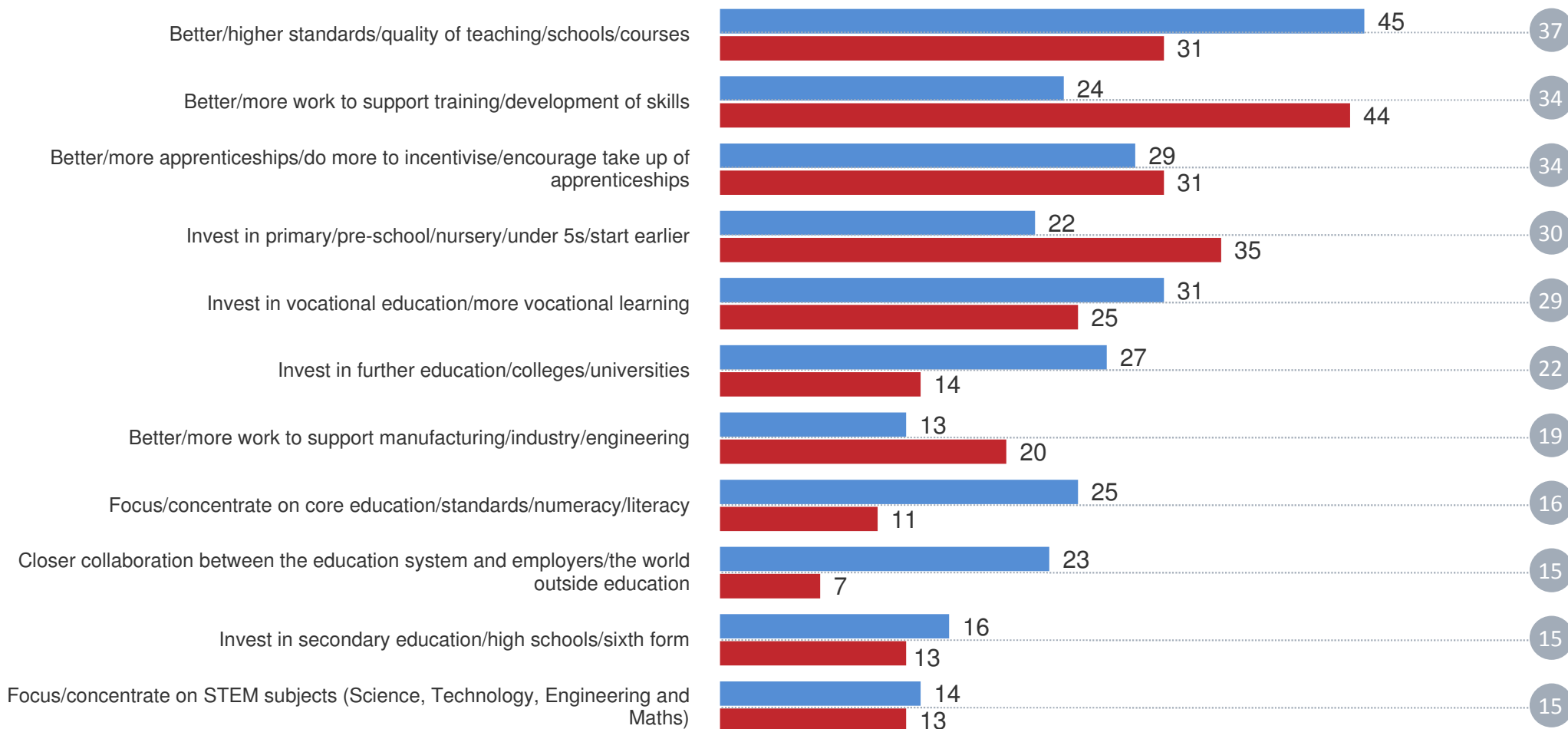
# Education and Britain's position in the world

I'd like you to think about education more generally, for example, schools, FE, universities, training and apprenticeships. Where would you invest to improve Britain's position in the world economy?

■ Conservative MPs ■ Labour MPs

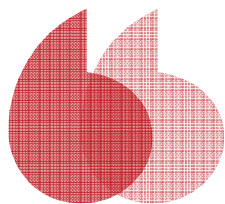
% All MPs

% Top mentions (unprompted responses)



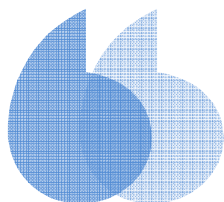
Base: All MPs (106), Conservative MPs (46), Labour MPs (47) asked, November-December 2014

# Where to invest in education?



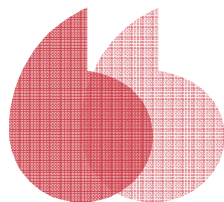
*Primary education because...the ones who have got to university are not the ones that need greater resourcing because they already have the wherewithal to do that, but what you really have to do is put in at the primary level to make sure that all of the children are brought up to that standard where they can go onto tertiary if they want to*

**Labour**  
Shadow Minister



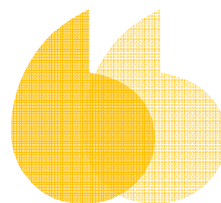
*The key thing is to improve the quality of teachers...the quality of teaching is by far the biggest single influence on the quality of education and therefore you should be prepared to raise the status of the teaching profession and pay more for good teachers*

**Conservative**  
Backbencher



*I would go for training and apprenticeships. My concern over the last few years is that young people are really given this myopic vision of the future – the only way they are going to get ahead is to go to university. It is not for everybody...and as a result we are losing our competitive edge in the manufacturing side, in areas like engineering*

**Labour**  
Backbencher

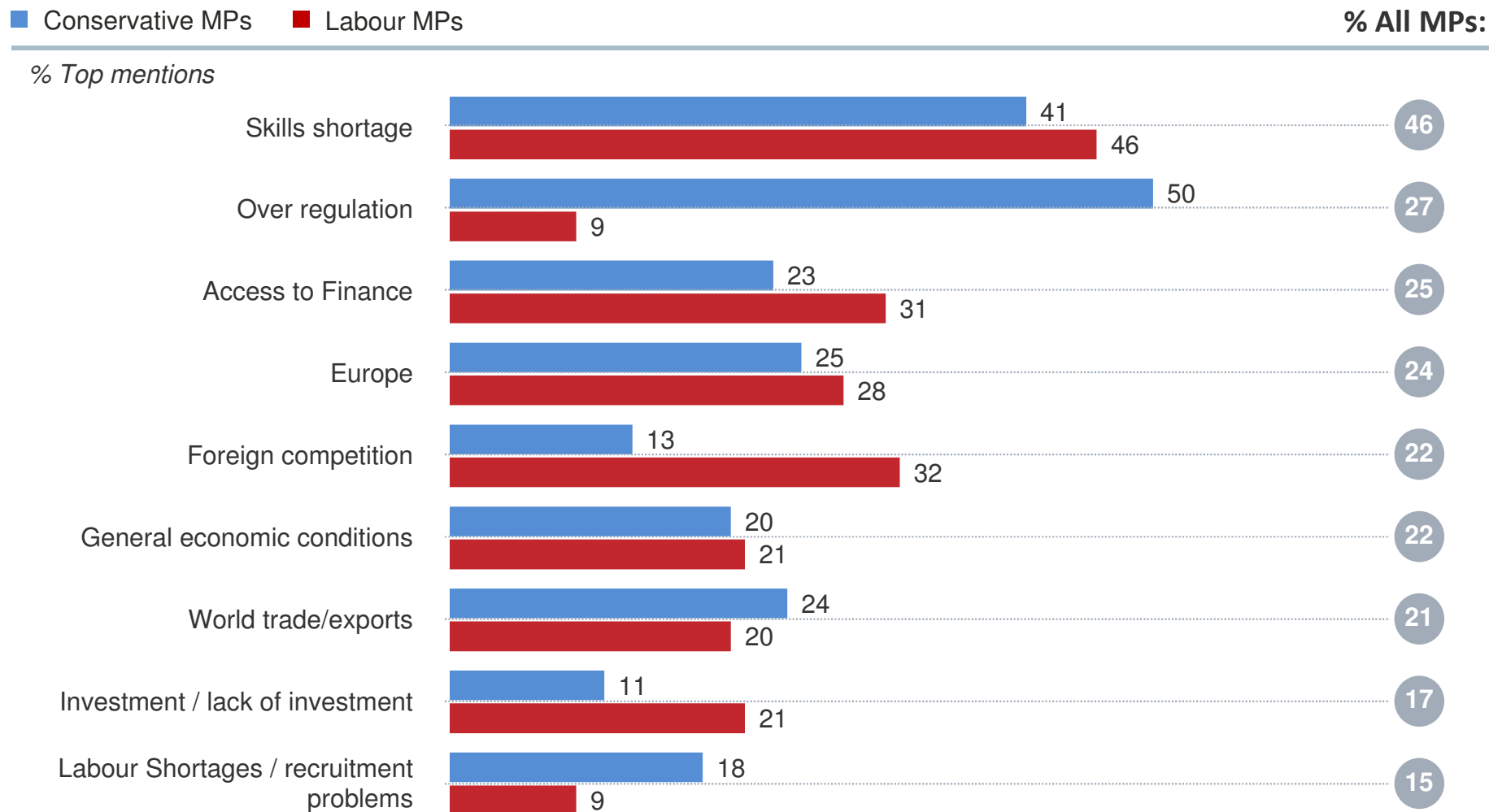


*I would try and do more with employers because there is a big gap between the skills that people are coming out of university and college with and the skills that employers want*

**Liberal Democrat**  
Backbencher

# Issues facing British Business

What do you think are the most important problems facing British business and industry today?



Base: All MPs (106), Conservative MPs (46), Labour MPs (47) asked, November-December 2014



# Appendix

MPs interviewed

# MPs interviewed:

## CONSERVATIVE MINISTERS

- Mrs Harriett Baldwin
- Dr Therese Coffey
- Mr Kris Hopkins
- Rt Hon David Mundell

## CONSERVATIVE BACKBENCHERS



- |                           |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Mr David Amess          | ■ Mr John Glen            | ■ Mr Mark Pritchard     |
| ■ Mr Richard Bacon        | ■ Mr Richard Graham       | ■ Mr Mark Prisk         |
| ■ Mr Guto Bebb            | ■ Mr Stephen Hammond      | ■ Mr Laurence Robertson |
| ■ Mr Bob Blackman         | ■ Mr Gordon Henderson     | ■ Mr Andrew Stephenson  |
| ■ Mr Peter Bone           | ■ Mr Gareth Johnson       | ■ Mr John Stevenson     |
| ■ Sir Peter Bottomley     | ■ Rt Hon David Jones      | ■ Mr Iain Stewart       |
| ■ Mr Graham Brady         | ■ Rt Hon Andrew Lansley   | ■ Mr Gary Streeter      |
| ■ Mr Aidan Burley         | ■ Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger | ■ Mr Martin Vickers     |
| ■ Mr David Burrowes       | ■ Mr Tim Loughton         | ■ Dame Angela Watkinson |
| ■ Mr Glyn Davies          | ■ Mr Karl McCartney       | ■ Mrs Heather Wheeler   |
| ■ Miss Jackie Doyle-Price | ■ Mr Nigel Mills          | ■ Mr Craig Whittaker    |
| ■ Mr Mark Field           | ■ Mr Andrew Percy         | ■ Mr Gavin Williamson   |
| ■ Sir Roger Gale          | ■ Mr Christopher Pincher  | ■ Mr Tim Yeo            |

1 Conservative Minister and 3 Conservative Backbenchers wish to remain anonymous

Ministerial status of MPs correct as per start of fieldwork

# MPs interviewed:



## LABOUR SHADOW MINISTERS

- Ms Luciana Berger
- Rt Hon Liam Byrne
- Ms Julie Elliott
- Mr Barry Gardiner
- Ms Diana Johnson
- Mr Kevan Jones
- Rt Hon Sadiq Khan
- Ms Seema Malhotra
- Mr Jamie Reed
- Mr Jonathan Reynolds
- Rt Hon John Spellar

## LABOUR BACKBENCHERS

- |                           |                     |                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ■ Ms Diane Abbott         | ■ Mr Simon Danczuk  | ■ Mr Michael McCann   |
| ■ Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth    | ■ Mr Ian Davidson   | ■ Rt Hon Anne McGuire |
| ■ Mr David Anderson       | ■ Mr Brian Donohoe  | ■ Mr Iain McKenzie    |
| ■ Rt Hon Sir Kevin Barron | ■ Mr Frank Doran    | ■ Mr Ian Mearns       |
| ■ Mr Hugh Bayley          | ■ Mr Paul Flynn     | ■ Mr Andrew Miller    |
| ■ Mr Clive Betts          | ■ Mrs Mary Glendon  | ■ Ms Meg Munn         |
| ■ Rt Hon Nick Brown       | ■ Mr Roger Godsiff  | ■ Mr Frank Roy        |
| ■ Rt Hon Alan Campbell    | ■ Rt Hon Peter Hain | ■ Mr Barry Sheerman   |
| ■ Ms Sarah Champion       | ■ Miss Kate Hoey    | ■ Mr Mark Tami        |
| ■ Mr Jon Cruddas          | ■ Mr Ian Lavery     | ■ Ms Joan Walley      |
| ■ Mr Alex Cunningham      | ■ Mr John Mann      | ■ Mr David Wright     |

1 Labour Shadow Ministers and 2 Labour Backbenchers wish to remain anonymous

Ministerial status of MPs correct as per start of fieldwork

# MPs interviewed:

## LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MINISTERS

- Rt Hon Simon Hughes
- Mr Stephen Williams
- Miss Jenny Willott

## LIBERAL DEMOCRAT BACKBENCHERS



- Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith
- Sir Nick Harvey
- Mr Greg Mulholland
- Dr John Pugh
- Sir Bob Russell
- Mr Ian Swales
- Mr David Ward
- Mr Roger Williams

## OTHER BACKBENCHERS

- Mr Hywel Williams

1 Other Backbencher wished to remain anonymous

Ministerial status of MPs correct as per start of fieldwork

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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## About Ipsos MORI Reputation Centre

The Ipsos MORI Reputation Centre was established with a simple aim: to help companies build more resilient reputations through stronger relationships with the people who matter most to them. Our approach is based on the understanding that research needs to be a catalyst for positive change – providing clear and practical advice that feeds directly into the stakeholder communications process.

The Key Influencer Tracking programme is a suite of multi-client studies that examine the attitudes and opinions of a range of elite, opinion forming stakeholder audiences. The first of these surveys was set up 40 years ago and the programme has gone from strength to strength ever since. Further details can be found at;  
[www.ipsos-mori.com/kit](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/kit)