

## LEO MCKINSTRY: Nick Clegg gets a knighthood despite destroying his party and costing taxpayers billions

By LEO MCKINSTRY FOR THE DAILY MAIL

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Yesterday, Nick Clegg was knighted by **Prince Charles** at Buckingham Palace in what is surely one of the most glaring examples of reward for failure in modern times.

As **Lib Dem** leader he destroyed his party and as Deputy Prime Minister he introduced a raft of failed policies that cost the taxpayer billions.

Unsurprisingly, given his record, he opted for no publicity shots at the ceremony — which is why we have mocked up this photograph with computer trickery to relive his moment of glory.

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This is the man who presided over the Lib Dem's worst electoral defeat in its history — reducing its number of MPs from 63 when he took over in 2007 to just eight when he stood down in 2015.

He pledged in the 2010 election to fight tuition fee increases for students — only to renege on his promise and treble them as soon as he seized power as Deputy PM in David Cameron's Coalition.

He preached about the need to reform 'tawdry Westminster politics', and lectured us on gender equality and fairness — but scandalously failed to listen to complaints by women in his own party that they'd been sexually harassed by his friend, former Lib Dem chief executive Lord Rennard (who was never charged).

work for you?)  
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He pledged to agree to the Tories' planned changes to constituency boundaries — a deal struck in exchange for a national referendum on Clegg's plan for an 'Alternative Voting' system that would give the Lib Dems more seats. And guess what? As soon as the AV referendum result went against him, Clegg reneged on that promise, too.

But it is not just that he was so untrustworthy. Clegg, who lost his Sheffield Hallam seat in the 2017 election, is also responsible for a litany of useless — and ruinous — policies implemented when he was in government.

### TUITION FEES

Last month, Theresa May announced a major review of university finance, prompted by concern over student debts that are now running upwards of £50,000 per graduate.

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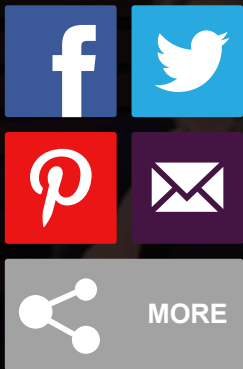
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Clegg might claim he agreed only reluctantly to the trebling in tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,000 under the Coalition, yet why should we believe him? After all the main theme of his 2010 election campaign video was politicians' broken promises: 'I believe it's time for promises to be kept,' he cried.

His promise to fight an increase in fees was no more plausible than Jeremy Corbyn's pledge at the last election to abolish tuition fees altogether.

With total UK student debt currently more than £100bn, and research by the Sutton Trust educational charity showing that 72 per cent of students won't pay back what they owe, Clegg must take his share of the blame for one of the most costly policies introduced by the Coalition.

### Former Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg gives farewell speech.

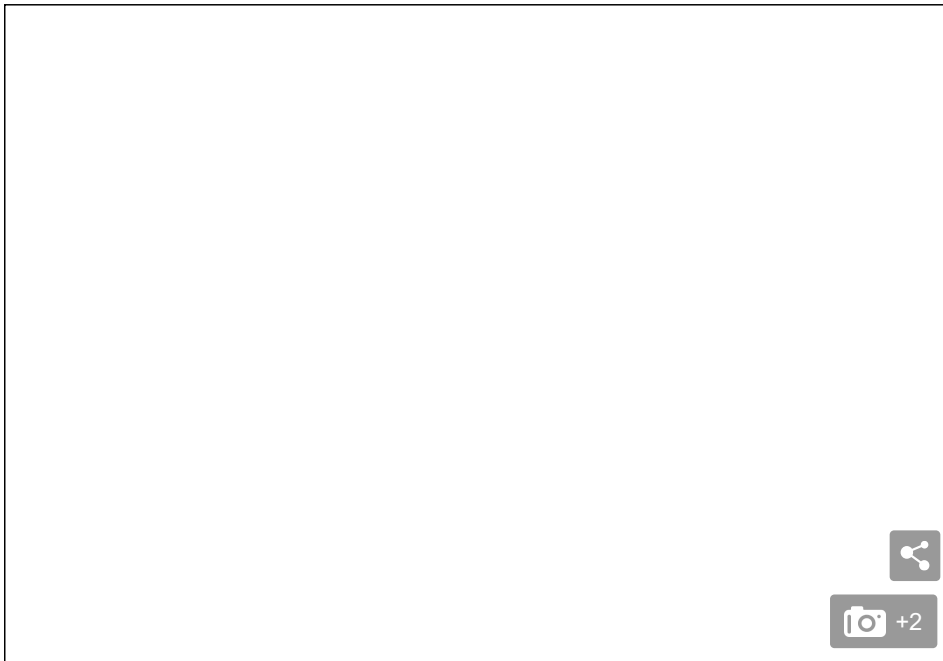




## THE GREEN DEAL

The Lib Dem manifesto of 2010 included plans to improve energy efficiency by offering taxpayer-funded subsidies for home improvements.

Much of this was through the Coalition's so-called 'Green Deal', a £400 million programme that encouraged households to take out loans to cover the costs of installing insulation, double-glazing and new boilers. But the initiative, launched with a fanfare in 2013 as 'the biggest home improvement scheme since World War II', was . . . a flop.



**Nick Clegg led presided over the Lib Dem's worst electoral defeat in its history — reducing its number of MPs from 63 when he took over in 2007 to just eight when he stood down in 2015**

A damning report by financial watchdog the National Audit Office found that £240 million was wasted by the Government, with just 14,000 households signing up — which worked out at a cost to the taxpayer of £17,000 for each household that joined the Green Deal before the programme was closed in July 2015.

The policy 'failed to deliver any meaningful benefit,' recorded the Audit Office.

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Clegg saw himself as the progressive architect of a new era of child-rearing, where fathers were encouraged by the State to share more caring responsibilities at home.

'I know lots of people of my generation who are desperate to get more involved but the rules prevent them,' he claimed in 2012. 'At the moment we have rules which may have made sense in the 1950s, but do not do today.'

To that end, he insisted the Coalition bring in new arrangements where couples could split the statutory 50 weeks off work between them. So a new mother could go straight back to work if she wanted, and a father could stay at home to change the nappies.

As most mums could have warned him, Clegg's vision of an army of stay-at-home fathers would never materialise. Last month, the Government revealed that although 285,000 couples annually qualify for the scheme, the take-up rate had been . . . 2 per cent, with fewer than 6,000 couples a year taking it up.

## PUPIL PREMIUM

Clegg enjoyed a privileged education at private school and Cambridge — but became fixated with social engineering for others in the schools system.

One result was the Pupil Premium, in which schools were given extra funding for each child from a disadvantaged background. Launched in 2011, Clegg's policy initially cost £623 million a year, but the total funding pot reached £2.41 billion in 2017, with each eligible primary pupil costing taxpayers £1,320 a year and each secondary pupil £935.

Yet there have been serious doubts whether this money has been well spent. A report by think-tank Demos warned in 2015 that the premium had done little for social mobility, and that the attainment gap between children from poor and affluent families had actually grown.

The policy also created extra paperwork for schools, not just in determining which pupils were eligible, but also for teachers who had to write down how they helped children in the scheme.

In a recent article in the Times Educational Supplement, teacher Thomas Rogers wrote that Pupil Premium was 'flawed as an idea, flawed as an actionable policy. Just because a policy aims to help poor people, in itself an admirable goal, doesn't mean it shouldn't be beyond reproach or protected from proper scrutiny.'

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Pressure from Clegg led the Department of Education to introduce universal free school meals for all pupils in the first three years of primary school education. He said this would 'restore the people's faith' in the Lib Dems.

But the scheme has caused chaos. It's not just that the cost to the taxpayer has been around £600 million-a-year, which some experts, such as Professor Alan Smithers of Buckingham University, say has 'taken scarce money from the education budget'.

One study in 2016 found that some schools were losing £4,000 a year because the extra cash still wasn't enough to provide so many free lunches.

Schools have also had to cope with the costs and chaos of installing new kitchens and dining facilities to cope with demand. Nor is it clear that free meals have led to an improvement in standards or tackled childhood obesity.

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'I don't think the implications of this policy were properly thought through,' said Chris Hassall, a Leicester headmaster.

### YOUTH CONTRACT

Clegg also posed as a champion of job creation for young people, with a scheme called the 'Youth Contract', in which employers were offered a subsidy of £2,275 for taking on under-25s out of work for more than six months.

The scheme was aimed at helping around 160,000 young people, but was an abject failure from its launch in May 2012. In its first year, fewer than 4,700 wage incentives were paid out, forcing the Department for Work and Pensions to admit that 'there has been very little take-up'. The scheme had to be abandoned in August 2014.

### CHILDCARE FOR TODDLERS

Never shy to use public money to parade his compassion, Clegg helped drive the Coalition's policy to offer 15 hours of free childcare for 260,000 two-year-olds in families where the parents earned less than £16,190-a-year. Around 40 per cent of all children that age were eligible for such support, described by Clegg as 'a helping hand'.

The idea, costing around £500 million a year, had originally been put forward by Labour but was implemented by the Coalition in September 2010.

Once again, the results were patchy. A study last year by the Social Market Foundation found that 30 per cent of the targeted families were not being reached by the scheme. And Clegg himself complained his pet project, like so many others, was in danger of 'withering on the vine'.

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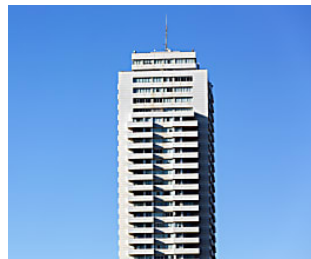
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