

Your questions answered

SJ: Why do you think politicians are failing to engage my readers' attention? Could it be because you haven't got more women in key roles in your cabinet?

DC: This is a difficult question. At the last election we did say that we'd have to make some difficult decisions and spending reductions. Who knows, that might have stopped us getting a majority, although it was the right thing to do.

We've had a long and difficult recession and life has been frustrating for a lot of people, which makes them frustrated with politicians. A lot of our institutions have come under fire, and they've all got to rebuild the trust. I hope we can do that in politics by focusing on the issues that people care about.

When it comes to women in key roles, I've tried my best. The number of Conservative MPs who are women has gone from 17 to over 50. Over a third of the Conservatives in Cabinet are women; I've got a woman Home Secretary and a woman running education – and about a quarter of my Conservative Ministers are women so I think we are making progress.

OUR HEALTH SERVICE

SJ: Headlines about the NHS crisis are very worrying for our readers. With an ageing population, something clearly has to be done to address the growing cost. Do you think people should contribute directly at the point of delivery?

DC: No, I don't: I believe in a free NHS at the point of use, based on medical need, not ability to pay. It's one of the great things about this country. But we do have more and more people who are old, frail, and who may have three or four conditions that need treating. At the moment, if something goes wrong, they most likely end up in A&E, which is not the best place for them. The answer is a combination of seven-day opening for GPs, from 8am-8pm across the country. Also – and this is something that has been established in my own constituency in Witney – local hospitals establishing Intermediate Care Centres where the elderly and frail can get treated, which will help to take the pressure off A&E.

A BETTER EDUCATION

SJ: How will failing schools turned into Academies be held accountable if they don't work? And how can your goal of raising literacy and numeracy levels at primary be achieved with 30 children per class?

DC: We won't put up with failure, so if any school is inadequate, we'll send in another team to turn it around. We are actually much tougher with Academies, where there is often intervention earlier than some Local Authorities intervene with their own schools. And there's the Ofsted inspection, so if you're branded inadequate you get a repeat inspection.

I would love to make a pledge about class sizes but I can't. That would cost a huge amount of money. All schools, in my view, should set by ability, particularly English and Maths.

THE ECONOMY AND TAXATION

SJ: If you raise the tax threshold, cuts will have to be made to raise revenue – where are you planning to make these cuts? And what about global companies not paying enough tax?

DC: In the next parliament we plan to continue making reductions in public spending – combined with economic growth. We also want to keep taxes low and, on

occasion, to cut them. The health service is the most important thing to families and we must protect that. The money that follows your child into education is important too. But if you look at the welfare budget, we spend £100 billion on working-age welfare and we've said we will freeze working-age benefits, which saves three billion. It won't be easy because we've still got an annual overdraft, which is too high. By 2018, the British economy should

have been growing for seven years and we should be paying debt. When it comes to global companies, I'm determined to make them pay. When I chaired the G8, I made the decision that top of the list would be tax and transparency. And so we kick-started a process, which has now led to countries across the world agreeing to share tax information so we can properly tax these companies. I'm not going to over-tax them but they should damn well pay it.



“He was focused and interested to hear about you, the readers I was representing”



My day with the PRIME MINISTER

Editorial Director Sue James shares some of the highlights of her recent day spent with David Cameron

Let's just say, it was not your average Monday morning.

It's not too often that you are summoned to Number 10, so when I arrived there one morning last month, having spent the weekend scouring the newspapers, tuning in to rolling news bulletins and social media to prepare for my interview with the Prime Minister, I was ready for anything. Although it wasn't my first visit, it was my first interview with the Prime Minister and I was excited to be there to talk to him on

behalf of you, our readers, and ask him the questions you've told me are on your mind.

We started with coffee and a chat in one of Downing Street's drawing rooms and the first thing that struck me is that David Cameron has that skill of putting you at ease. He was entirely focused on our conversation and I felt he was interested in me but – more importantly – in you, the women I was representing.

Of course, with family being so important to all of us, the conversation turned to children. We were soon talking

so much that the photographer had to ask us to stop and look at the camera!

We then travelled to a school in Enfield where the PM was announcing some key initiatives on education. We left by the back door into a waiting people carrier for a very high-speed journey as part of the Prime Minister's police-escorted cavalcade. Let me tell you, I've never got to Enfield so fast!

Then, after his speech we had a chance to sit down to talk properly and hear his answers to your questions...

ADDITIONAL REPORTING VICTORIA YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHS GETTY IMAGES, REX FEATURES, THE GUARDIAN, TREVOR LEIGHTON



Sue meets the Prime Minister at Number 10

CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

SJ: We talk about best practice in other areas but not for carers for the elderly. Will a uniform standard (for language, qualifications, plus adequate checks and pay) for carers be introduced?

DC: Our new Care Act tries to do exactly that; create a benchmark and to set the standards for care. We've shaken up the inspectorate of the Care Quality Commission, which was going quite badly wrong. We put a new team in and they are going into the care homes that need attention. I still think we can do better, >>

both in the standards of domiciliary care – people coming into your house – and also what happens in residential and nursing homes. And there are training standards for being a carer, but they ought to be more consistent.

CONCERNS OVER IMMIGRATION

SJ: Immigration is another one of our readers' concerns. How do you reconcile our place in Europe with British desires to limit numbers coming into the country?

DC: Outside the EU, immigration has come down, thanks to the action we have taken since 2010, for example, closing down 700 bogus colleges. But inside the EU, migration has gone up, partly because Britain's economy has been strong and we've been creating 1,000 new jobs a day, which is why I have put forward tough welfare policies that I will secure as part of our renegotiation with the EU.

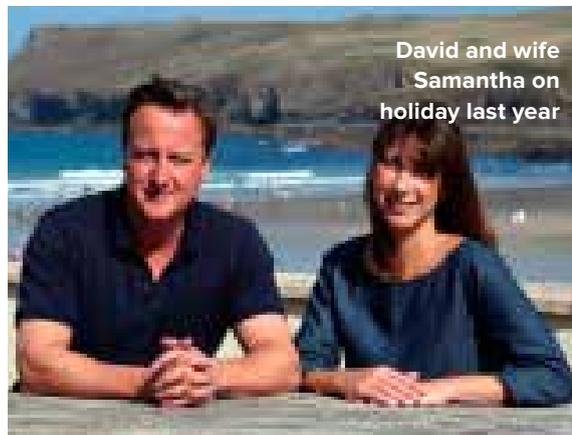
There are four parts to it; firstly, if someone comes to the UK from the EU to look for work they do not get unemployment benefit. Secondly, if they have not found work after six months, they will be forced to return home. Thirdly, if they do find work here they will not be able to claim in-work benefits like tax credits or social housing for four years. And fourthly they will no longer be able to send home child benefit to their country of origin.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE WEB

SJ: With the growth of the internet, we've seen a rise in cyber crime, hacking, online bullying, stalking, trolling, grooming by paedophiles – what's the best way to tackle this?

DC: One worrying danger of the internet is the ability of terrorists to communicate undetected, and we have made changes to the law to ensure that it keeps pace with the changes in technology. But as a parent, one of my biggest fears is what children are able to access online. Five years ago, I called on internet companies and providers to restrict what material they allow children to see and they've responded by setting up family-friendly filters, and ensuring that illegal material is much more difficult for paedophiles to find.

Meet the other side of David...



SJ: How would your friends describe you?

DC: I hope they'd say I'm optimistic, I enjoy life and that I'm fun. But also that I'm quite driven in doing what I believe in. I really profoundly believe in this job and what I'm doing but I try to keep a balance, because although this job is a complete passion, at the same time it's my judgment that matters so I've got to keep good balance and pace to make sure I don't get frazzled and fried. So I do take breaks: last weekend I did an 8-mile bicycle ride along the Windrush valley in beautiful cold sunshine with Samantha and two of our children. That, to me, was a perfect Sunday morning.

SJ: What's your perfect night in?

DC: That's easy. It involves cooking – and eating – then watching a good detective drama on TV – or *House of Cards*. Ideally we'd be at our

home in Oxfordshire, which feels more and more like home.

I love cooking; it's a very good way to get your mind off things. Yesterday I made roast chicken and all the trimmings and my signature dish is probably something slow-cooked – like belly of pork or shoulder of lamb. I'm also an obsessive barbeque-er; one of the most exciting moments of the year for me is when the cover comes off the barbeque!

SJ: Your wife is famously stylish... does she buy your off-duty clothes?

DC: Samantha has extremely good taste. And I'm not really interested in clothes; mainly I like wearing clothes that don't make me stand out – I tend to go for Marks & Spencer and Gap – and I do get put in the changing room at Gap and clothes are passed to me under the changing room door – a bit like feeding time at the zoo!

SJ: If you hadn't gone into politics, what would you have done instead?

DC: I spent seven years at a media company and I enjoyed it, and probably could have stayed in TV because it was interesting. But what excites me is public service, politics, trying to represent people and getting things done – that's what gets me out of bed.

SJ: Is it true that behind every man there is a great woman?

DC: It certainly is for me. I'm very lucky because Samantha is amazing; she truly is the empress of multi-tasking, and amazing at doing it all, from overseeing the children's homework, having a business life of her own, doing a lot of charity work, and supporting me as Prime Minister.

SJ: How do your children feel about you being PM?

DC: My eldest two know that Daddy is Prime Minister, which means a lot of stuff in the newspapers but they seem to channel it quite sensibly; they like their school, they've got lots of friends and they like seeing me as much as possible – at least I hope they do! My youngest is only four and it probably hasn't sunk in for her yet. But she has a good school and if we provide stability for them at home I'm sure they will be OK. >>

“Samantha is amazing; she truly is the empress of multi-tasking”

How the policies compare

Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg campaign head-to-head...



LABOUR ON... THE ECONOMY

- Get the budget into surplus and the national debt falling “as soon as possible in the next parliament”.
- No additional borrowing for new spending.
- Reintroduce the 50p top rate of income tax for earnings over £150,000.
- Cut income tax for 24 million people by bringing back the 10p rate, paid for by scrapping the Married Couple’s Tax Allowance.
- A tax on bankers’ bonuses.
- A 5% pay cut for every government minister.

THE NHS

- A £2.5 billion “Time to Care” fund (paid for by a new mansion tax on properties worth over £2m and tackling tax avoidance) to pay for 20,000 nurses, 8,000 GPs, 5,000 care workers and 3,000 midwives by 2020.
- “Whole person care” (mental, physical and social care is at the heart of the manifesto).
- The Health and Social Care Act (which abolished Primary Care Trusts) to be repealed.
- A guaranteed appointment with a GP within 48 hours.
- Guarantee a maximum one-week wait for cancer tests and create a new Cancer Treatments Fund to improve access to treatment.

EDUCATION

- All teachers would have to be qualified.
- Parents of primary school children would be guaranteed childcare from 8am to 6pm.
- The amount of free childcare for three and four-year-olds would be increased from 15 to 25 hours a week.
- Refuse to grant business rate relief to independent schools unless they can show a “meaningful impact” on state schools, for example by lending teaching staff or assisting in university admissions procedures.
- Committed to allowing 16-year-olds and over to vote.
- Ensure all young people study English and maths to 18.

IMMIGRATION

- 1,000 new border staff and people counted in and out.
- Close down loopholes that enable people to exploit short-term student visitor visas.
- Employment agencies who only recruit abroad will be outlawed, while fines for employing illegal immigrants will be increased.
- Ensure maximum transitional controls to place restrictions on workers from any future countries joining the EU.
- Reinstate fingerprint checks at the border.
- Give people here the skills they need for the future by ensuring that large companies bringing in workers from outside the EU also have to offer an apprenticeship for a local worker.



THE LIB DEMS ON... THE ECONOMY

- Raise the personal allowance – the point at which you start paying income tax – to £11,000 in April 2016 and then to at least £12,500 by 2020.
- “Strict new fiscal rules” to ensure the deficit has gone by April 2018, with the wealthy contributing the most.
- The Lib Dems first proposed the mansion tax but, in contrast to Labour, have set out how it would operate – along similar lines to council tax bands.
- There are also Lib Dem plans to increase capital gains tax – paid on profits from second homes or shares – from 28% to 35%.

THE NHS

- A real terms increase in NHS funding of £1 billion in 2016/17 and 2017/18 funded by capping pensions tax relief for the richest pensioners (saving £500m), aligning dividend tax with income tax for those earning more than £150,000 (saving £400m) and scrapping the Conservative shares for “employment” rights scheme (saving £100m).
- An extra £500 million (this £500m is included in the £1bn above) for mental health services and a pledge that 75% of those waiting for talking therapies for depression will

- be seen within six weeks.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards to be increased in size and given

- power to hold budgets.
- A new “Right to Respite” package for carers to be introduced, including an annual “Carer’s Respite Bonus” worth £250 for those carers looking after someone for 35 hours or more each week over a 12-month period.

EDUCATION

- Protect the education budget from cuts. Extending the Lib Dem manifesto of a protective ring-fence which currently applies to schools spending on 5-16-year-olds to the entire education budget covering early years and 16-19-year-olds. The budget would rise with inflation each year.
- Guarantee qualified teachers and a core curriculum set by independent experts, in all state schools including academies and free schools.
- More money for disadvantaged school children and 15-hours-a-week free childcare for all two year olds.
- Support lowering the voting age to 16 in all UK elections.

IMMIGRATION

- Support the right to free movement across the European Union.
- Reintroduce exit checks at borders, so the government can identify people who are overstaying their visa.
- Require all new claimants for Jobseeker’s Allowance to have their English language skills assessed, with JSA (jobseeker’s allowance) then being conditional on attending language courses for those whose English is poor.
- Tighten up benefit rules for migrants, including reducing, and ultimately abolishing, payment of child benefit or children who are not resident in the UK. **w&h**

