

**PEARSON UK – Policy hot breakfast briefing, 7 May 2014****Transcript****PART 1:** [http://youtu.be/HqH\\_rR4Od3g](http://youtu.be/HqH_rR4Od3g)

\*TITLE\* Policy 'hot breakfast' briefing: Education 2015 – 7 May 2014

\*TITLE\* A look at the UK's education issues as we head towards the 2015 General Election.

***Martin O'Donovan, strategic communications director, Pearson UK***

Good morning everyone and welcome to Pearson. Thank you for getting here at an ungodly hour in the morning to enjoy the breakfast and hopefully enjoy what will be a very interesting discussion of the election and the debates in Education for 2015. My name is Martin O'Donovan and I'm the Strategic Communications Director here. I'm going to be a very very brief introducing and light touch chair and then I'll facilitate some questions at the end. We have three very good speakers – I say actually I'm going to be a light touch chair, someone told me with this tie I should picture myself as the John Snow of this debate but I'm not going to be doing that! I will just say a couple of words to introduce our speakers and before I do maybe I should just say we are one year from a general election, I have a test for any historians out there which is:

*I believe this is the first time in British history that we've known for sure and for certain that this is one year from a general election campaign because of the recent fixed term Parliament Act being passed.*

But if anyone knows different then they can raise their hand now and correct me – no, I thought I was right about that but I wasn't 100% sure. There is going to be a huge kind of debate on every issue under the sun over the next year, there are some very interesting takes that I read in the last couple of days, one by Lord Ashcroft this morning in the Daily Mail, it goes through the political ups and downs and machinations. One by Patrick Winter in the Guardian yesterday went through similar territory including an interesting "What happens if..." around Scotland and the Referendum so there's all sorts of bends in the road that we'll have in the year ahead, but this morning we aren't going to worry about those political machinations or the debate in Scotland you'll be pleased to hear, we're here to talk about education, big policy, context and the big policy discussions that are likely and we have a very eminent panel to do so.

The first speaker you'll hear will be my colleague Steve Besley who is the Director of Policy and Insight here at Pearson in the UK. Steve will do a run through of these policy horizons. Steve will be followed by – and I'm not going to jump up at that stage – Jonathan will carry on and speak. Jonathan is the Head of All Education at Policy Exchange which is, in my view, Britain's leading and most influential Think-tank at this time and is an organisation that we've worked

closely with and have enjoyed working with Jonathan with, and Jonathan will bring a similar look at the policy world but perhaps with a little extra twist of politics to it I'm sure. They will be joined very shortly by John Woodcock MP who is the Member of Parliament for Barrow in Furness (I'm 99% sure I've got that right). John is somebody who will bring a flavour of what's the view from the doorstep in Barrow as well as being somebody who has got a real interest and passion in education. Barrow for example has schools that are not doing very well at the moment in the national picture and John has decided to become a Teaching Assistant for an hour or two a week just to get a stronger view and flavour of what might be the reasons, the underlying reasons behind that problem that he has locally and that children have locally, in his area.

So that's probably enough from me. I'll come and facilitate some questions later but if I hand over to Steve.

***Steve Besley, Director of Policy, Pearson UK***

Good morning everybody. The theme for this morning of course is Education 2015 and the education issues that are likely to prove significant in the next general election which of course is just one year away. To set the context I'm going to beg 10-15 minutes of your time if I may, I speak very quickly, I through a lot on slides, we'll get through a lot as much as we can -

\*SLIDE – Current policy picture\*

- just to set the picture of where education is at the moment and I hope that will provide a useful context for the two eminent speakers that follow me. Right, so let's start with the current big picture, broadly as most people will know, for the last four years the Coalition Government has been pursuing the objectives in the Coalition Agreement that was set out, you remember, on that May day 2010 with 24 education objectives, the majority of which were for schools, 17 in all and a sprinkling for higher education which at that time was considering of course the fees issue and a couple of FE very much around skills and apprenticeships so the majority of those objectives whether we like them or not have been pursued with various degrees of relentlessness, enthusiasm and discipline that has gone with the Coalition Government. The key papers of course were passed, or pushed through, in the early years. The Education White Paper for schools, the New Challenges, New Chances programme for FE and of course the HE White Paper and whether we like it or not I suspect much of the change has been fairly dramatic or fairly transformational. Things like Free Schools, new GCSEs, performance related pay for teachers, employer funded apprenticeships, a new fee system for HE. These are fairly dramatic changes so the big question is this of course and it's the obvious question:

Is it any better? Has it made things any better, has it improved things, is performance improving?

Well, the tone of Ofsted's last annual report which came out just before Christmas of course was certainly more positive. Last summer produced some highly credible results, youth unemployment you could argue is going down and the numbers going to university remain high. Yet, if you look at the most recent international performance bench marks and those are typically the OECD report on adult literacy and numeracy last October and the PISA tests for 15 year olds last December, the word that was most commonly seized on by the media was that performance was "stagnant". So, it didn't seem to be suggesting that there was massive improvement as yet and as you can see I've listed them at the bottom of that slide there, a number of enormous challenges remain, anything from performance levels in English and Maths to of course the long term sustainability of HE funding.

I'm just going to look at five areas starting with **schools** which arguably will be where most of the policy activity will be for the rest of this year into 2015 and who knows beyond if we've got the stamina to cope with it.

\*SLIDE – 1. Schools\*

You can see at the top there where schools are at the moment, that's the latest data on performance from Ofsted's annual report clearly schools are going through a massive amount of change at the moment but without ploughing through all that stuff there, let me just highlight what I think will be the three crunch issues for schools:

First, perhaps inevitably *management of the schools system*. The schools system now which is nearly 4,000 academies, 170 plus free schools, 20 plus UTCs and so on, so a very different and much more diverse schools system. How on earth is that system to be managed to avoid what Graham Stewart, the Chair of the Education Committee called "managing from desk in Whitehall". At the moment the model being adopted by both political parties is a Local Commissioner Model and you'll perhaps be aware that The Conservatives are appointing, indeed have appointed, six of the eight Regional School Commissioners who are due to take over in September and will be managing school at a local level. Labour of course you will perhaps have seen David Blunkett's report published last week, is going for a system of Directors of School Standards. Now quite how this system or these systems will operate is very difficult to say at the moment. As I say the Conservative Model of Local Commissioners doesn't come in until September and indeed if you get to the end of the Blunkett proposals the last recommendation of the 40 is "we would scrap them anyway" so it's a bit difficult to know quite how the system will develop but I think local accountability, local management of school standards is very very important and challenge one, managing the schools system

Challenge two is about developing the quality of the performance of the school and the profession. Both sides recognise that schools need a lot of freedom or space to develop but is the self-improving model that the Coalition Government has been running with teaching schools, direct schools and so on, is that the way forward or should there be perhaps a system

in which teachers undergo formal CPD and are accredited on regular occasions. So there's a dividing line emerging here between an externally driven system and an internally monitored one.

And the third and last issue I think that will be the big policy issue for schools is about the management of change and of course the phrase that we hear a lot these days "change fatigue". I see from the NAHT Conference over the last weekend they carried out a survey of parents and change fatigue is beginning to hit them as well. So there is a sense that there's so much change going on that actually it's very difficult for schools to cope, for parents to cope and of course for learners to stay a stable system. Many people feel that this kind of endless switching between one politically inspired set of changes and another every few years is what lies behind our current educational malaise and it was interesting to see, in the Blunkett reforms that there was a proposal for an independent advisory committee on the curriculum to the Secretary of State. This is certainly something we've been looking at very closely at Pearson, we have an international respected independent committee looking at how we develop world class qualifications and I think that the question therefore is, is a political inspired model the way forward or should we have some kind of independent advisory body that would be able to advise the Secretary of State and others on change and processes that go with it.

So they're the three issues I've tried to identify for schools.

\*SLIDE – 2. Young people and skills\*

There are five of these issues, the second one of course is critically important, no political party wants to go into an election period with high levels of youth unemployment and with disenfranchised and disenchanted young people. Both parties have been very active in this area, the Conservatives, the Coalition Government of course with the Woolf Reforms for 16-19 accountability arrangements and so on and Labour with its proposed new 14-19 diploma based framework; the paper for that came out in March. So again, you can see all the detail that I've put up there for you, all sorts of things that have been going on. Let me see if I can just draw out two key issues for you here:

I think the first key issue here is the development of a robust transition route what are sometimes called "the other 50%", I know Lord Baker doesn't like the other 50% term, the group of people who perhaps don't go on to university, he says it should be anybody. But these young people who don't typically go through a standard transition programme into higher education, what sort of transition route have we got for them? Current activity is being focused on developing an employer or market driven careers guidance system, Coleman Portal for information on qualifications and a UCAS style application system for perhaps 16 year olds who are not clear what their training options are. I think the key issue here therefore is what kind of transition programme we've got, what kind of support arrangements we've got for those young

people who don't typically through the standard route onto further higher education and follow the norms in that way.

And the second issue for young people and skills is about how best to implement skills development alongside essential core requirements, there is a general acceptance of English and Maths that are core requirements for young people but what about skills development. I think it was Lord Adonis who said at one of the presentations at our skills event earlier this year that he very rarely heard employers asking if a young person had a passion for 19<sup>th</sup> Century romantic poetics, Byron and all the rest of it. He seemed to suggest they were more interested in whether they could turn up on time, were polite to customers and had the skills to be able to fit into that employment culture. So I think the curriculum balance between the essential core requirements of subjects and the skills developments needed, particularly by young people closer to the labour market is very very important and we'll be watching and indeed are watching very closely the current mechanism for this, the TechBacc or the national diplomas as the Labour party call it to see whether that is the vehicle that will enable young people to enter the labour market with a balanced portfolio of skills.

\*SLIDE – 3. FE\*

Third, FE – what are the issues around FE, further education and training providers of course. For FE its very diversity is both its strength and its weakness. It's strength because it allows the sector to respond to a huge diversity of needs, learning needs, social needs, economic needs and so on but this indeed is also a weakness because it means that it leaves FE fairly poorly understood and poorly measured, poorly held accountable as a result. At the moment as I see it, two possible divergent approaches are emerging from where FE is going. First from the government which has tried to free up colleges, enabling them to be "more agile" in how they respond to market needs" and so on. Now some of this has helped and some of this has been welcomed and some of this been hugely valuable but many providers, many FE colleges, many training providers still say that they feel hampered by, for example, funding requirements, qualification restrictions and so on. What seems to be happening, and I sight as evidence for this Vince Cable's recent Cambridge lecture is that the government is moving towards what we would call a Centre of Excellence Model, an elite tier of specialist providers such of course as the HS2 and the Prospects College, both of which have now been announced as new FE colleges, such as these particular colleges appear to be, in other words, dedicated colleges able to respond directly to the sector and to employer needs. So that seems to be the model coming from the government side at the moment. If we take the Labour side, perhaps if we were to take for example Tristram Hunt's speech to colleges last Autumn as the blueprint there seems to be a more Managed Model. One in which colleges are accredited and I think this was the term he used, as Institutes of Technical Education (ITEs) and their job would be to deliver an employer derived although ultimately government prescribed set of skills. So we seem to have

two different approaches to FE emerging and I think that the debate is between the old all-singing, all-dancing general FE college of the past which served a huge number of needs and perhaps the drive towards more specialist, dedicated skill centres. There is arguably room for both but I think this is the debate that's going to happen, what kind of FE system will we have from that.

**\*SLIDE - 4. The Skills System\***

The skills system, never particularly well understood, and what we mean by the skills system is the whole range of agencies, funding bodies, regional committees, local supply chains and so on that make up the wider training system. Hugely important now as the economy starts to recover and the appetite and thirst for skilled, like-minded workers begins to become more intensive. Again I think two issues stand out here and you can see a lot of the detail and what's been going on but two issues I would highlight just to draw out and focus it. First, it's a bit of a rhetorical question, but is the current enthusiasm for seeding ownership of the skills system a) desirable – is this what employers want, is it something they're keen to take over, have they got the systems to manage it and b) is said enthusiasm being required in equal measures by all employers. I mean it's very different because people have pointed out for smaller employers to be involved in this kind of ownership model. We've always tended to have a politically determined skills system rather than an employer determined one and I think trying to convert one inside the other is proving quite a challenge. And the second issue I would draw your attention to under the skills system is what we call the sub-regional problem, in other words all the different bits and pieces, the instruments, the mechanisms, the funding systems and so-on at a local/sub-regional level. The current slogan in here is what's called "a clearer line of sight", drawing a clear line of sight between the employer and the provider opportunities for learning and qualification outcome and I think this is going to be something we'll hear a lot more about particularly as the authors of that phrase, the Commission on Adult Vocational Training and Learning will be reporting this summer on it.

**\*SLIDE – 5. Higher Education\***

And finally, just coming towards the end we can't ignore the fifth big area which of course is higher education. The big issue here of course is the sustainability of the current student loan system where a series of reports and not just from partisan bodies but from bodies like The Institute of Fiscal Studies, The London Economics and so on have been treating us to a range of doomsday scenarios about future funding of higher education. At present, again, I think there are potentially two lines, two options emerging. Option one which is broadly I think, and I trust I'm not being unfair, broadly where the current minister is, is to sit tight and hold your nerve, gradually lift the lid on the control of student numbers and as the graduate market improves and volume increases money will then flow back into the treasury, the funding pressure will ease and the sustainability for higher education funding system will improve – I've not got my

fingers crossed there! Option two being developed by the opposition, and this very much builds on John Denham's key note lecture at the start of the year is to flex up the system to two-year degrees, employer sponsorship, perhaps bringing together tuition and maintenance loans, set the maximum fee at a lower level and thereby incentivise and encourage growth in higher education and that too will bring funding in. And the key issue I think there for the opposition is whether to reduce the maximum fee level and I think that's something that the party is looking at. A key issue for both parties, just before I leave HE and just wrap this thing up, is really then how far the historical model of the three year degree, campus based, formally taught through a publically funded institution remains in its present form or whether alternative forms of provision should prevail and I think that for a sector that generates something like £73 billion for the economy, what happens to the funding system is something that touches everybody.

\*SLIDE – The world as the politicians are planning it\*

So, just very very quickly, this by way of summary is just my kind of little mapping of where the major announcements and developments have been made over the last six months and you can see I've broadly tried to capture it under the three major parties and the three main segments that I've been talking about; Schools, FE and Higher Education. Very difficult to take it all in now, it is a summary slide and you're very welcome to have a copy of it if it proves useful.

\*SLIDE – Building up to 2015\*

Penultimately, just a reminder the chronology if you go down towards the timeline you will see that the next big moment is May 22, I think it is, the local elections and the European elections so if you go up a little bit and you look at the current key phrases just to remind you that I'm not being Jeremy Clarkson by talking about "Waitrose woman" I'm reminded that there is also "Blue Harbour Man", there's also "Aldi Adults" there are all sorts of different phrases that are emerging for different rankings of voters.

\*SLIDE – Key things to look out for this year\*

But finally, and this is my final slide, just to leave there for you for a minute, a reminder that as we look ahead to 2015 and the election, one year away today, that also there is a huge amount of other activity that has to be completed or would aim to be completed through the rest of this year. From, as you can see at the top:

- Further building work, pointing work around the qualifications system, and I've intimated there where that will be for schools for things like GCSE grading, regulations and so on.
- For further education around apprenticeship standards and online learning.
- A big heave on English and Maths, a very important area.
- A final modelling of the accountability systems for primary, secondary and 16-19 education.



- Some sharper application of funding rules.
- Further potential arm wrestling, I'm suggesting over the way in which the school and indeed the college system might be managed.
- Continually talk, tough talk on performance perhaps.
- Continuing concern also about under achievement and how the attainment gap between different groups could be achieved.

And bit by bit, then we shall see a sharpening divide between the major parties as 2015 looms and these issues become much more clear from a party perspective.

Right, without further ado and forgive the gallop through that – you're very welcome to have a copy of the slides if they're of value to you – I'm going to hand over to Jonathan from Think-tank Policy Exchange who will take you through some other thoughts.

\*TITLE – The discussion continues in part 2\*

## **END OF PART 1**

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**PART 2:** <http://youtu.be/GyKl1i-iMZQ>

### ***Jonathan Simons, Head of Education at Policy Exchange***

Good morning everyone, thank you very much Steve. Steve has covered very very comprehensively quite a lot of what's going on in the system. I thought two interesting things actually, two immediate reflections on what came out of Steve's presentation other than just the sheer volume of things that are going on. The first thing is that it took him until about the 12<sup>th</sup> slide for the Liberal Democrats to get mentioned, which I think is perhaps symptomatic of the way that they've fallen out of this debate slightly but it is very very possible that they will still be in government in 2015 as part of a Coalition Government so let's not forget what the Liberal Democrats are talking about in education and indeed how they're positioning themselves vis-a-vis the current Coalition; and Labour at the moment I think that's interesting. The second thing I noticed was that Early Years barely was mentioned on that as well which again, is that symbolic of the fact that that's relatively low down in the education debate – or in fact I do know and I think the answer is yes and I'll come on to talk about that a little bit more. But I thought those were two interesting omissions but other than that it was a hugely comprehensive look at what's going on so I'm not going to attempt to repeat that I'm just going to give an overview of how I see things from a policy perspective but also from a political perspective. It's very much my own opinion only, nothing more should be taken into it than that – I'm very very happy to be disagreed with, very very happy to take questions on it afterwards but this is how I see things shaping up.



I think education in the next election will be a mid-tier issue, I think that the election is clearly going to be dominated by what can be variously described as the economy/cost of living crisis/global race/the cuts, that's going to be the defining issue of the 2015 election just as it was in 2010, there's no indications that it's going to be anything other than do you trust the Coalition having returned the country to economic growth or do you think it was their fault in the first place, who do you trust to make the continuing cuts that are still going to need to be made after 2015 which all parties acknowledge are going to still have carry on going; of which education incidentally will almost certainly not be excepted. So that's the first big major issue and I expect that to dominate the vast majority of what happens in 2015. The second issue I think is likely to be something around immigration/Europe and that's particularly going to be the case if UKIP are playing an important role in the debate. That's not because, I would say, it's the second most important issue in the debate but because of the presence of UKIP and what that's going to mean for the Conservatives and particularly given Labour's symbolic energy freeze that's going to be a big discussion as well about the extent to which Europe deals with all of those things. It's not going to be a big public service reform election I think, to the extent that people do talk about public services, they're going to talk about it through two prisms. One is broken markets, so Labour are going to talk a lot about broken markets and they may dip a toe into the public service markets as part of that. We've had the energy price freeze, we've had talk about re-nationalising the railways, we've had talk about various other freezes and caps. It's not beyond the bounds of possibility that at some point that will get into public service markets and they'll start to look at the various private industries who are involved in public service markets in education, in healthcare, in welfare and start to make some kind of commitments about that. So we may get a discussion about public service markets and again there's going to be a discussion about cuts and, as I said a second ago, I don't think education is going to be exempt from those. I think it's very possible that at least one of the two main parties continues to commit to protect school funding in real terms, or in cash terms. I think it impossible that there's going to be a funding commitment or a protection of spending commitment beyond that. What does that mean? Well it means that other than the kind of very core bit of schools funding, schools will continue to take financial hits and I think it's even worse for the rest of the sector. So I think if you're in the HE sector, if you're the FE sector, if you're in the Early Years sector - or frankly if you're in wider Children's' Services - you can expect nothing but further cuts I'm afraid; so that's a cheery message to start us of on.

The reason I think education is going to be a bigger debate than perhaps what has been suggested is largely because of the personalities and a lot of this depends on whether Michael Gove is still Secretary of State or whether he's reshuffled out in the cabinet reshuffle that's going to come after the European elections. I have no idea whether he's going to be or not, there's been a lot of briefing about this over the past few months, there's been a lot of briefing that suggests he's going to move and take on a more election focussed role and potentially

become Party Chairman. There's been a lot of counter briefing saying no, he's staying exactly where he is. There's a lot of stuff coming out of the Liberal Democrats in particular that suggests that he's going to go. I have no idea, I suspect nobody has any idea but there's a very very real possibility that he may move as Secretary of State in the next month or so. If he doesn't and he remains Secretary of State until the election he will be a major figure in the campaign there's absolutely no doubt about that. He polls very very well amongst Tory voters. So if you look at the ConHome monthly survey of cabinet ministers he's always at the top or near the top, he polls very very well and he's very good at getting out to Tory vote. On the other hand he polls spectacularly badly amongst non-Tory voters. He's a real marmite politician so although conceivably he works as a get out the vote for both sides, or all sides and I think so therefore if he's there he will be a very very public figure, he will talk a lot about education as a sort of dog whistle to various wider Tory reforms but he will be used a lot to get out the vote and therefore the education portfolio will assume a slightly bigger responsibility. If he's not in, I expect Tristram Hunt to stay regardless, but if he's not the Secretary of State I think it's possible that education will be a much smaller issue and it will just be wrapped up into a general discussion around what cuts public services will need to make.

So I think what the Coalition have done since 2010 is very very symbolic of their overall approach to Government. So what have they done since 2010? Well the rhetoric has all been about decentralisation, has all been about freedom, has all been about autonomy, has all been about pluralism and that is probably the single biggest public service area where that reform has been most fully thought through. So again if you look at what the Prime Minister says, if you look at what Gove says, if you look at what all Secretaries of States say, once they've talked about the economy they then mention education second up and then welfare tends to come third. Now welfare tends to drop off the list now as universal credit continues to be in difficulties, but education is still held up as a symbolic "look at what we have done as a Coalition" and it's held up still by both halves of the Coalition. They both talk about education as their real flagship for what they've done. I think the other reason that education is symbolic of course is that it's also symptomatic of the areas where that narrative hasn't necessarily been consistently followed through. So there have been huge areas of education which have not been particularly autonomous and I think if you work in Children's Services, if you work in Further Education, I think if you work in bits of the Early Years you would not necessarily think that you have had a very decentralised, autonomous, granting you more power over the next five years. I suspect that you would say you are still continuing to be hemmed in by the various accountability pressures, by the funding pressures, by the various reporting requirements and I suspect, as I say, even in schools I don't know many people that said they've had a kind of rosy time of it, funding wise, over the last five years. So in many ways the kind of critique of the Coalition that they've been in many ways centralising education is a fair critique, I think part of that is by design and part of that is accident. So things like phonics for example are a very clear

statement of centralisation, there is no getting away from the fact, and they will say that absolutely explicitly, the Coalition wants every single five year old in this country to be taught synthetic standard phonics and that's just a very centralising measure and there's no way of getting around that and they will quite happily say that. There are some areas for example like Academies where I think the centralising has been more accidental. I don't think Michael Gove envisaged in 2010 that he would be, or that his permanent secretary would be, the accounting officer for almost 4,000 academies and that when the DFE accounts go in front of the Education Select Committee as they do today, and the Education Select Committee say basically, there are material errors in your accounts, one of the major reasons why is because every single academy account feeds into the overall DFE accounts. The DFE have almost zero control over what over 4,000 academies are doing to spend their money but yet the accounting goes directly up to the government because of the way that it works in public accounting rules and because of the funding agreements that were signed between the academies and the Secretary of State. This is an incredibly centralising measure – the fact that 4,000 schools have signed a 70 odd page document personally with the Secretary of State or his officials with a variety of quite complicated legal structures in it, this is a very very centralising measure. I don't think it was necessarily the intention I think it's just kind of emerged that way and so I think that's an interesting tension.

So let me talk a little about where I think that all three of the main parties are going to be in education in 2015 and Steve's covered quite a lot of this. I think the Conservatives will have two distinct messages – I think all parties will have two distinct messages to be fair, they'll have a message to their base and they'll have a message to the kind of floating voters and that's fairly standard political practice – what's the Conservative message to its base? Well I think it's going to be the following things, I think the Conservative message to their base will be, in roughly this order, will be we've sorted out the curriculum so that it's not dumbed down anymore, we've sorted out assessments so that's not dumbed anymore, we've sorted out discipline, we've sorted out exclusions and we've introduced performance related pay and we've brought in new free schools which breaks the power of the local authorities. That is more or less the Conservative pitch to its base, as I say, in that order. The Conservative pitch to – I don't want to use the phrase moderates – floating voters, non-Conservative voters, non-Conservative members I think is slightly different, it has some of the same messages but in a slightly different order. I think the Conservative message to the country at large will be rise of school standards, I think it will be greater school freedom and accountability and then I think it will be curriculum and assessment reforms and then I think it will be about greater power for teachers. That I think is the broader Conservative message in 2015 is we have granted power to head teachers, standards are rising throughout our country, that is what we have been elected to do and that is what we will be continued to elected for in 2015. Now, interestingly I haven't mentioned a single thing in there that's not a schools message and I think that is quite

symbolic. I don't think many of the parties are going to much about things that aren't schools and I certainly think that's the case for the Conservatives.

What are they going to say about some of the other areas? I think they don't have much to say on Early Years. I suspect if Liz Truss had won her argument on ratios that would have been their big Early Years push, cheaper childcare, that's not going to now happen. They're talking a little bit now about extending the school day for childcare purposes, I suspect if that comes to something that will be their Early Years push. What are they going to talk about in Further Education? They'll talk about more apprenticeships but what are they going to talk about the skills agenda more generally, not a lot I would suspect and similarly in Higher Education, what are they going to talk about? Again, not a lot. I think all three parties are grappling with what they're going to say about fees and all the things that Steve talked about. I think at the moment with the possible exception of Labour I don't think the Lib Dems or the Conservatives are going to talk much about HE at all. I think the Conservative message will be as steady as it goes, more liberalisation, more funding for universities, more freedom, more diversity blah blah blah – a holding pattern, let's see what happens in the next election.

So that's the Conservatives, what do I think Labour are going to say – and again John may correct me on this – what do I think Labour are going to say? I think the Blunkett Review is hugely symbolic and I think it went much much wider than the slightly narrow techie question of the middle tier. I think it's very very symbolic because whoever it was that asked David Blunkett to do it in the first place, I think it was probably Stephen Twigg, you kind of know what you're going to get with David Blunkett okay. David Blunkett was a very reformist Blair-ite Home Secretary, and I say that as a thing of praise, I suspect most people don't take it as that as such, but he was an incredibly Blair-ite Home Secretary – and Education Secretary of course – and unsurprisingly he has produced a very very Blair-ite report and one of the things that I think is interesting about the Blunkett report is in many ways it continues the trend of taking power away from local authorities. If the Blunkett report is introduced wholesale I think the local authority role in education will almost disappear. I think they'll have a small residual role in Children's Services, I think they'll continue with things like safeguarding and child protection but what role will local authorities have in education if Blunkett is introduced I would say none, beyond administrative managing of admissions, coordinating of funding for the remaining schools that aren't academies, that's it. If you take Directors of School Standards and you give them quite a lot of power that's it for local government and I think if labour decide to go down that route that's actually a quite provocative bold way of taking things forward. I suspect strongly that they won't do it in that sense in fact I know they won't but that is a kind of logical conclusion of what Blunkett says. Other than that, what are they going to talk about? Well there's a few quite symbolic commitments that they're making which are all around actually moving autonomy for schools so there's commitments around qualified teacher status which is a real dog whistle thing for Labour. If you hear Tristram Hunt talk to his Labour base, he always

talks about qualified teacher status, it gets mentioned at all the teaching union conferences, it gets mentioned at all the kind of sector things I've ever been to. It goes down like a treat in Hall and I'm not going to argue about whether it's the right thing or the wrong thing to do but it's a hugely hugely powerful message for his base and he's going to continue to talk lots and lots and lots about qualified teacher status as a proxy for his wider approach to the system which is contrasting what he says is the Conservative slash and burn race to the bottom, freedom for all, let anyone teach your kid approach with a kind of high skilled, high value, collaborative school system which is kind of what he wants to introduce. Now again we can have a debate about which one is right or wrong but that is clearly his broader message is that Labour is going to have a high value, collaborative schools system so whether it's qualified teacher status, whether it's school nutrition, whether it's various other quite small things the message is very very clear from Labour that schools are going to be much more collaborative, that it's not going to be a race to the bottom that it's going to be high value and that they're going to work together. What are Labour going to talk about other than in non-schools, childcare in Early Years is quite big for them so Lucy Powell is doing quite a lot of work on this flagship commitment around 25 hours of free childcare and extending primary schools to do childcare 8am-6pm. It's essentially a reintroduction of the last Government's Extended Schools Policy. I think that's going to be quite a big thing, I have no idea how they're going to do it and there is no money attached to this and as people will know from the last time Extended Schools happened Government basically bunged it almost £2 billion as a subsidy, it still didn't work very well, how on earth it's going to work when it's free even if parents are being charged for the childcare I have real scepticism about how it's going to work in its current model but nevertheless it's going to be a big thing that Labour talk about for Early Years and again I don't think the Conservatives have got anything to talk about. What are they going to talk about in Further Education, again they're going to talk a lot about the forgotten 50%, there's a lot about technical education, there's a lot about reforms, what that might look like in practical terms I'm not so sure but it's definitely going to be a big rhetorical part of their offer and in Higher Education again Liam Burn is talking again quite explicitly about a return to £6,000 fees. Again a lot remains to be seen as to how that's going to work in practice and in particular how that gap is going to be funded. John Denham is doing some really really interesting work on this, I can't quite follow how the funding flows work, he seems to be suggesting that we've got lots of debt on one side so if you stop paying that debt then you can move all that money to teaching grant and I think that seems to be kind of magic-ing money out of thin air but I think if they can get that to work and they can make a headline commitment to reduce fees from £9,000 to £6,000 that we can have a debate about the policy of it but politically it will be very very symbolic and again it will contrast with the Conservatives who will say almost nothing on HE.

What are the Liberal Democrats going to say, well the Liberal Democrats are in an odd position of course because again education is one of their flagship commitments and they talk about it a

lot and they talk about the pupil premium a lot and the fact that pupil premium is one of the first things that any Liberal Democrat minister says right from Clegg down. They talk about the pupil premium first and foremost and then they talk about the £10,000 tax allowance. I think they're in some difficulty here because they don't know whether to side with the Coalition or to differentiate themselves from the Coalition and I think trying to work out which one of those routes they go down will be quite symbolic and David Laws himself is actually writing the manifesto so there's going to be quite a lot of stuff in there. I suspect there will be an increase to the pupil premium, I suspect the other thing they're going to do, and I saw David Laws at ATL conference, and he was talking to ATL a lot about stability in the system and again that got a huge round of applause and basically he was saying if the Liberal Democrats are in power and in position they basically won't do anything in education for the next year, two years potentially through to a Parliament, it's explicitly a period of stability, again that goes down very very well with the sector, it might be something they commit to do. They're talking again about Early Years, extending childcare to one year olds, Early Years is a big thing for Lib Dem voters, I'll talk quite a lot about that and they are the party that will say the least about Higher Education, for obvious reasons. They will have to mention it literally in their manifesto, I don't know what they're going to say but I strongly suspect it will be nothing of substance at all because they don't want to remind everyone about Lib Dems and Higher Education. Further Education, again they'll talk warm words about apprenticeships and skills and high value but I don't get the sense that there's really any specific policy coming out, so all parties are in an interesting position. I think schools is going to kind of be, as Steve said, the dominant thing they'll run with. The Tories will talk about almost nothing else, Labour and Lib Dems will have a few bits in Early Years and Higher Education and Further Education, that's how I see things shaping up and now I'm going to hand over to John.

***John Woodcock, Labour MP for Barrow and Furness***

Thank you very much Jonathan and apologies again for being late, I think if there was such a thing as a qualified MP status it would probably include basic ability to navigate the public transport system and I failed comprehensively so hello!

I think it a pleasure and very useful actually to sit through both of those presentations and I would quite like to take away your slides at the end given the level of detail in them. Let me give some of the broad brush context into how this stuff fits within the political landscape as I see it at the moment. I don't know how many of you in any extracurricular activity that you do get out on the doorstep and talk politics but I am struck by, if this is a trust election and I think as Jonathan rightly says, how little trust there is around at the moment for anyone within the system and you look at the extraordinary polls about how people are going to vote in those local and European elections and you look at how high UKIP are polling. Yesterday you saw a suggestion that 40% of Conservative voters are planning to vote UKIP in this election and that



gives a sense of just how disillusioned and crying out for something better and more credible, people are because Europe is only I think a small part of actually UKIPs prominence at the moment. The greater thing is a sense that the political system as it stands does not have a grip on the long term problems facing the country and that is the challenge and the great opportunity I think for my party, for Labour now in this period between now and the General Election to show that we are the party of the future that can have a better sense of where this country ought to go and the parameters which ought to guide it.

Now, if you look at the two campaigns shaping up, I was in the Labour Campaign HQ in 2005 for their election, when Linton Crosby ran Michael Howard's campaign and you fast forward 10 years and actually it's the same campaign that he is running for David Cameron now and it remains to be seen whether it's effective but it is certainly crude. It is focused on big message on the need for cuts for the economy, dialling up welfare concerns, dialling up immigration and there's not a great deal else beyond/beneath that. Now, because we beat that in 2005 I think the challenge for my party is to make sure that, just because we beat it in 2005, 2015 is very different and we have to raise our game significantly from, certainly where we started in 2010 as a government which had just been defeated with far too a low a share of the vote. I think in that context Ed Miliband has done an extraordinary job in getting us to where we are with a genuine opportunity to win, to form a government after one term in opposition and I think, I would take issue a little bit with some of the characterisation in both of the excellent presentations that we had before about our approach to the State, to markets in education and elsewhere because I think Ed has come in and grasped the seriousness of a situation where the decade of investment we had in public services and our economy over the New Labour Government years, there is no way that that returns. We are going to face coming into government a ferociously difficult investment climate right across the board and you are shaping up for a real difference, a genuine difference I think between the Conservatives and Labour in their approaches to that and, as Steve spelt out in the education sphere, you have a basic difference in approach that philosophically at least, if not always in practice, the sense from the Conservatives that the response to that needs to be to shrink government and to certainly reduce the amount that is spent by government but also reduce its influence on a host of areas of public life. Now, Ed's response to this, and we have to be able to convince people on the doorstep that mean what we say and that we can deliver, is that at a time when money is so incredibly tight, you need a much more active government than before to be able to understand where markets are not working properly and be prepared to intervene, to squeeze every last penny of value out of the system for people who are going to be inevitably squeezed in other ways.

\*Title - The discussion continues in part 3\*

**END OF PART 2**



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**PART 3:** <http://youtu.be/7dZbkTKoVvQ>***John Woodcock, Labour MP for Barrow and Furness***

I think Jonathan is right in saying that education is not going to be maybe in the way that it was in 1997 and 2001, one of the absolute top tier issues. But it's hugely important and it's important for two reasons, one because it just remains such a critically important part of people's daily lives either taking their children to school or equipping themselves for the job market that they want to go in to and all of our polling still shows that. But also it is important as one of the key tests for a future government of "do you understand the changes that are happening in this country and do you have credible ideas for how to make our lives better" and being able to understand the education system and give people a sense that it can better under the other parties remains critically important to our election message as well as the need to do it and I would say that, the contrast which you have put between market let everything bloom and State intervention on the Labour side is probably a little bit too crude, because I've been really impressed with Tristram since he has come in, and Stephen Twigg before him – but the message that I take, and this is really important for me personally, as someone who believes in strong public sector reform and being able to understand how market forces within the system, that we want to keep what is working from the current changes and some of the changes have got a chance to be successful, difficult though they are, but things like qualified teacher status are not simply a message to the base, it is saying that these changes and the sense of education choice for parents which is hugely important in people's life and important as a driver of education performance needs to take place within a coherent framework because we will never work in education, as you know much better than me, in that perfect market where you can just make changes and then things happen because if you screw up in the education system, if a school screws up for five years that is one cohort of young people in an area whose big start in life has been blighted. So, there needs to be an element of more active intervention and management we think than is being implemented at the moment. So that is how I think education in a very broad way fits in to the picture; that holds true for education as well but this will be, I think, although this election is about trust at the moment it is about who you trust to take the economy forward over these next few years and who can deal with the cost of living crisis in the country. Actually underpinning that, more than maybe we are talking about at the moment we are acutely aware of this, is a sense of if we are going to deal with a lack of trust for politicians and the political system at the moment we have to understand from whence that flows and our sense is that when the economy crashed and we had our hand on the tiller when it happened but you had a woeful response from the opposition as well, you've been left with a sense of, from the public thinking none of you actually got to grips with the problems in this country and we are awaiting from all of you to be convinced that have a long term plan to get

us out of this. That I think will actually be the underlying battle ground for the campaign even if it's not what is mentioned on the doorstep when you first knock on the door what they're concerned about and whether they're going to vote Labour or Tory at the elections. So this is a fascinating campaign to be involved in – it's hugely important not just in Barrow-in-Furness we got the lowest swing to the Conservatives in the whole of England, not that anyone is counting! But it is a massive thing for me to be able to say that Labour has a genuine chance of winning and forming the next Government and I am excited by that but I recognise that we have got a long way to go between now and polling day to make sure that the offer we put and when we take office we have a programme in education and in other fields which is going to be able to hit the ground from day one to be able to make a genuine difference in improving things. Thank you.

***Martin O'Donovan***

Thank you very much to all of our speakers. Now we're a bit over time I'm afraid but what I'm going to propose is that we just take a great load of very brief contributions from the floor, if you can be as brief as possible and then rather than responding individually I'm going to ask them all to not only respond to your questions but give closing remarks all in one go, so let's try and do that in 10 minutes flat. If people would like to do by a show of hands, make their contributions, comments on be it on trust, the economy, education, primary, schools, FE, HE something you virulently disagreed with or very strongly agreed with do raise your hand now.

Qu: Alistair Thompson from NIACE – two observations, one nobody has mentioned Ofsted do you see any possibility for a reform in that as well as part of the mix and secondly the issue of a potential blurring of the boundaries of further and higher. It is going to be very hard to reform a three year full time degree because of the Bologna Process and the European dimension of that but flexing up HE in a different way and probably merging with advanced FE are we going to see the return of Polytechnics?

Martin – I'm going to specifically ask Jonathan to respond on Ofsted because he's done rather a lot of prominent work there.

Qu: Wendy Jones, National Numeracy hat on today. There was mention I think from Steve at the beginning of sterility in policy and that seems largely to be backed up by what I think others have said. Are there any signs, there was mention of QTS, Early Years, changes around accountability, but can we expect any big surprise ideas that suddenly do emerge in the manifesto like, for instance, we had pupil premium last year, or the last election rather. Are there likely to be things that we just haven't thought of which might come to the fore.

Qu: James Cemmell – the cost of living crisis issue with Early Years, nursery education, of course the two are quite linked for many families, interesting there were some comments on those and also to underscore the point that was made by the first questioner. Already within Bologna the UK is taken very much of a minimalist standard in terms of the length of higher

education degrees whereas of course most European countries are four year degrees minimum. Increasing the flexibility is probably going to make us a little bit less competitive, I'm interested in your thoughts on that.

Qu: Dan Taubman, of what was formerly UCU now The Institute of Education. Next year we see the first hit on 16-18 funding if schools budgets are to be protected beyond that it is likely not to include 16-18 can the 16-19 study programmes survive cuts to 16-18.

Qu: Graham Lane, Education Leader. The Local Management Schools were introduced by Kenneth Baker and it was the perfectly right decision because it allowed schools to manage and run themselves which is absolutely right but who then should intervene if there is something which the school is unable to do, if the standards are falling. That's the issue I think the Labour party should face up to and be quite clear what the schools are and what the role would be, either local government or some other middle tier.

Qu: Hello, Aaron Booth, FE Policy Advisor to the NUS. I'm just wondering in terms of market forces being introduced into the education sector across the whole board, what sort of options are any parties looking at towards, you wanna say hear freedom of choice for schools but when you can choose three places and not get any of them, what can you do then? Obviously if Labour are gonna oppose free schools then what other options are there?

Qu: Chris Rossiter, Drive Youth Trust, just on the context of continued cuts and how schools are expected to deliver their new responsibilities under the draft Code for the Special Educational Needs in line with the Children and Families Act.

Qu: [Mark Anstee, Pearson] 2015 may be another hung parliament what effect would that have on education policy, and which way would the Coalition would go.

Martin – what a interesting question to wrap up with, so as I walk back I'm going to ask the three of them to give closing remarks, reflect on what one another have said, take on each and any of those questions as they see fit. I'm going to particularly ask Jonathan to look at the Ofsted question and there was a question around market forces which Jonathan you alluded to in your presentation so if you could pick that one up. John I'm going to ask to pick up the specific question, the challenges to Labour on standards and also I'm going sneakily, because I know you were once an adviser over HE policy to see if you've got any reflections on HE, so I'll land that one on you! Just a couple of thoughts. And when Steve wraps up I'm going to ask him what the big surprise is. So, who wants to go first.

### **John**

Thank you Martin, to be clear the education stuff is not my fault, I was not an adviser on HE I was an adviser on business after skills had been switched over. Let me just give, if I may, a personal reflection on what is going to be our driver, what ought to be our driver for improving standards if the free school model is changed because I think you hit the nail on the head about

this issue of people not being able to choose the schools that they want is so important for them. Both in terms of their own lives and as a break on the kind of education that they want and improving standards. I think there is a space for us and we are looking at this, although I'm not directly part of the education team as you know. To give more powers to parents, to be able to pick the school of their choice, now I would like to see, although it will cause some real challenges in the education system, a default right of parents to send the child to the school of their choice and the school giving an obligation to try to expand to take that – we're not there yet but, I mean that could be a very powerful driver of standards. Finally on HE, we have absolutely right in terms of, we have got to weigh up the options and come forward with our manifesto with what we're going to do on funding. If we are looking at how the market in HE is not optimised at the moment a key area for us must be, I think, the mismatch between the choices that young people are often making for the degrees they want to take and the way that the system by necessity institutions chase those places to gain funding and the mismatch between that and actually the qualifications which they're to come out with to be able to fill the jobs that we know that we are going to have. Now that is not an easy thing to tackle but I think it is the next big reform waiting for the HE sector. We are talking about this, just before I handover, the education system at a time when the Blunkett reform has been put on the table and we need to consider our response to it. I think it is a great document but how we engage with that will obviously be very important for answering the questions which you rightly raise about what you do to be able to have a hold on standards and accountability locally to be able to improve school management.

***Jonathan Simons***

Thanks very much for those questions and just on the two that I got nominated to answer, what role do I think Ofsted is going to play? I don't think it's going to be an election issue as such because actually a lot of what Ofsted is going to do has already been decided so there's a lot of changes to the schools framework, all of which were expertly previewed in the Policy Exchange publication, but in all seriousness kind of a lot of changes to kind of light touch inspections to good and outstanding schools which is absolutely the right direction of travel. I suspect that there may be further changes to the Ofsted Early Years framework but they probably won't come up until after 2015. So Ofsted will continue to play a huge role on the ground but beyond people mostly rightly moaning about it I don't think it's going to be an election issue as such. Market forces in education, look we could spend all day talking about markets and education. I think, so what's worth noting, well number one is there are a huge amounts of markets in education already, there is a huge amount of private investment in education so much of the Early Years sector is run privately. FE sector, a lot of FE learning is done privately, universities, a lot of that is done privately. Special schools are almost all run by private or not-for-profit providers, Ofsted is run by private providers, you know as well as the independent sector schools spend anywhere between about 10% and 20% of the budget in the private sector,

between buying in and the resources of IT, their curriculum etc. There is a huge amount of markets already in education so people who sort of inveigle against market forces in education sort of need to have a credible answer for what they think is going to replace all of that. Markets need rules, what Ed Miliband said yesterday I thought was actually a very very pithy summary of basically what I think, as well let alone what Labour think. That's true and education is a public market, what does that mean, well it means that there are different rules to normal markets. It means there are rules around failure ? it means there are rules around fair access, it means there are rules around how things are funded, what information people have, it means there is a universal service obligation. Nobody is proposing to run schools like we run supermarkets. Nobody is proposing that there should not be a basic minimum standard. Do I think that in general some form of competitive pressure, some form of diversity, some form of diversity, on the whole produces better inputs for people than an entirely State dominated system, yes I do. Do I think that that means all things should be free at the point of use, with the exception of higher education and further education, yes I do. What does that mean for the future of public markets well I hope it means that they will continue much as they are in the sense that you will have state funding to the vast majority of this and very very carefully regulating it and providing incentives so that "consumers", by which I mean children and young people, are well protected and survive. I think that, I mean Ed Miliband to give him his due, an incredibly coherent philosophical agenda and I think what's fascinating is the people who say – Ed Miliband doesn't know what he stands for, Labour doesn't know what he stands for could not be more wrong and actually I think that's really really becoming clear over the past few months and look, like it or dislike it, he is the politician who has, head and shoulders got the clearest the idea of what he wants and Labour I think are the clearest party in terms of what they want from public services, from the economy, they have the clearest articulated view of what they think this country should look like. And that's what politics should be about right? You can like it or you can dislike it, you can vote for it or not vote for it but nobody should be in any doubt that they understand what a Miliband led government would mean for public services, I think there are some bits of it I really like and there are some bits of it I think I really don't like, but that's all to the good but I think markets in public services still have to play some form of role.

**Steve Besley**

Very quickly then, Martin asked me to say what would be the big surprises, I think as Wendy said, the big surprise is that there is no big surprise, but two very quick ones, and I know Isobel is in the audience, so I'm looking at you Isobel. My big surprise would be a change to the regulatory procedures in which we have one body looking at skills and one body looking core education and that's taking us back to NCVQs and all the rest of it but I do wonder whether that might be there somewhere and my second one which is much more grandiose and a pompous way to end is, are we seeing the end of the grand reformers, a grand education ministerial

performances, bit by bit the education system shifting away from politically led towards much more strategically local led.

Martin a few words to sum up.

***Martin***

Shall we give them a round of applause I thought that was all very good. Thanks to each of our contributors, very interesting I thought that there was a lot of time spent talking about policy and not very much on personalities which I think is probably not how the next 12 months will play out in terms of the wider general election campaign but very nice to hear!

\*\*\* END OF SESSION \*\*\*