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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 2 June 2017



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

We're down to the last few days of the 2017 General Election campaign and according to some of the polls down to the wire in terms of grabbing votes as well. The general view is that the Parties will spend these last few days of the campaign trying to ram home core messages rather than attempt to come up with anything new or different, so how's it looking on the education front?

First, if you want a reminder of what's been promised, there are plenty of helpful summaries available. If you want the detail, the Education Policy Institute has published a comprehensive [analysis](#) of all three major Party education plans. If you want it summarised, the [TES](#) and [FE Week/Schools Week](#) have produced helpful sector summaries, while if you like it in chart form, the [NAHT](#) and [HE Policy Institute](#), to cite but two, have done just that for HE and schools respectively.

Second, education remains a high priority for many people. It's still high up among voter concerns and on social media and the major Parties have duly responded with nearly the same volume of proposals as in the last General Election. But it feels different this time round.

For a start, the policy proposals are not rooted in any grand vision or set of beliefs, it's all rather functional, Gradgrind as John Dunford put it. Second, and a follow-on, there's little attempt to get to grips with some of the deeper issues that lie behind a policy area like education. Laura McInerney's 'coco pops v sandwiches' quote cited below captures it well. Debate over the merits of lunches versus breakfasts matters of course but there are also some profound issues that afflict education that warrant deeper attention and haven't got it. And third, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies have pointed out, there remains the issue of how much we can rely on the various funding promises. With caution, is their view.

So what are the key education areas to note?

Arguably three stand out. First those areas where things are likely to carry on much as before; these include primary assessment, the development of a technical route for young people, apprenticeships targets, and the implementation of an Industrial Strategy. Each was at various stages of development or implementation prior to the election and the manifestos don't seem to have changed things much. Second, there are some areas which following election pressure, may well require a reboot; these include Conservative plans for more selective schools, the EBacc, teacher retention, local skills planning and careers guidance. And third, there are some areas where the pressures are so great, some radical thinking may be needed; these include school and 16 – 19 funding along with the much vaunted Conservative review of tertiary funding, local accountability of schools, regional performance gaps, Prevent and student visas. Quite a mix



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Top headlines this week

- 'Four in five reject Tory plan to lift faith admissions cap.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Mindfulness and wellbeing lessons can make school pupils even less happy, experts claim.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Record number of teenagers say they enjoy reading.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'College finances improve after period of stability.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Manifesto messages](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) presented its verdict on the two major Party Manifestos concluding that neither presented what it called 'an honest set of choices'
- [Education plans](#). The Education Policy Institute published its comprehensive analysis of what the respective major Party Manifestos were saying about education complete with summary comments and assessments of funding
- [Status of EU citizens](#). The EU discussed the key principles it's likely to present to the UK as part of the Brexit negotiations with important potential ramifications for the future status of EU citizens and workers
- [Ordinary Working People](#). The Resolution Foundation delved into the concept of the 'ordinary working people' that politicians seem so keen to address and concluded that while many still have what might be called a traditional job, things are changing with more people working in service industries, more female workers and an increasing number working as self-employed or in the gig economy

HE

- [TEF interpretation](#). Sarah Stevens, Head of Policy at the Russell Group, argued in a comment piece for Wonkhe that care needs to be taken in interpreting the trial Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) results due to be published in a couple of weeks' time
- [Brexit priorities](#). A delegation from the Russell Group of universities met up with senior officials from the EU to discuss HE priorities ahead of the launch of the Brexit negotiations in a few weeks' time
- [Manifesto lines](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new chart showing the main Party's policies on HE
- [Deterred by debt](#). The Research Centre at the London Institute of Education examined two student cohort surveys, one from before the tuition fee rise and one after, and concluded that while young people are increasingly willing to take on debt so as to be able to go to university, a fear of debt deters those from poorer backgrounds
- [Participation priorities](#). Nicola Dandridge, Chief Exec of Universities UK, blogged about the continuing issue of access and participation in HE, confirming that Universities UK does not see fees as the immediate issue but will be instigating a programme of work looking at a range of other issues



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FE/Skills

- **16-18 funding.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) examined the respective major Party plans for funding 16-18 education in England noting that it was an area that had fared particularly badly in recent years and that while Labour was proposing an 8% increase, the plans from all Parties would still leave the sector 10% worse off than the school sector
- **High Five.** Ian Pretty, Chief Exec of the Collab Group outlined five FE and skills priorities for the next Parliament including tech education reform, devolution of skills policy, setting up Institutes of Technology, an enabled FE commercial climate and a smooth Brexit
- **FE or HE?** An article on the conservativehome page suggested that the Conservatives were gearing up for a fight with HE as it sought to shift funding and support from HE to FE to help create 'a world-class tech system'

Schools

- **Key messages.** The Key organization published the results of its latest extensive survey into the 'State of Education' in England showing among other things that 75% of school leaders want to see a better balanced school curriculum while just over 50% of school leaders expect budgets and funding to be their biggest challenge in the year ahead
- **School details.** The NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) updated its fact sheet on academies and maintained schools setting out the latest numbers and performance figures and suggesting no great difference in terms of performance between the school types
- **A good read.** The National Literacy Trust launched its latest annual Young Readers Programme with a survey showing that record numbers of children and young people enjoy reading, generating potential benefits in learning and life
- **EBacc languages.** Education Datalab looked at how many more language teachers would be needed if the Conservatives run with their manifesto commitment of 75% of students taking the EBacc by 2022 and suggested that many schools would have to increase the number of language classes offered
- **Education of the head, heart and hand.** The think tank IPPR published the first of what's intended to be a collection of essays on schools in the future in this case by Peter Hyman, former government adviser and current head teacher and co-founder of School 21 who used his essay to stress the importance of a curriculum that combined the head, heart and hand, or broadly: knowledge, resilience, skills
- **Primary Futures.** The Education and Employers organization and NAHT joined forces to report on the role of employer engagement in primary education and how the Primary Future project was helping bring this about

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Our current ed system is pretty brutal for heads. We'll run out of people prepared to take on challenging schools if we don't fix it" - @Samfr
- "Assessment needs to sit at the point between teaching and learning. Collecting the right data is key" - @Mike_Bostock



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Other stories of the week

- Teachers standing as MPs. The number of teachers represented in the last Parliament was pretty small, just over 30 out of 650 MPs or a bit higher if you include those who have had some connection with education such as serving as a school governor. Many people feel it would be helpful to have more former teachers in Parliament particularly when it comes to discussing education matters. The Guardian this week reported on five teachers who were standing in the current general election, all keen to have a say on education. The story is [here](#).
- How to give a brilliant leaving speech. This is the time of year when many teachers keen to move on will have handed in their notice. The majority at some point will have to navigate the ritual of the leaving speech: short and sweet or punchy and payback time? For those who find such occasions difficult, it seems that even seemingly effortless speakers such as Martin Luther King practiced well beforehand. These and other tips can be found in [an article](#) this week on the FT by a correspondent who herself was leaving and sought guidance as to what to say

Quote(s) of the week

- “Conservative plans to launch a major review of funding across technical education should send a shiver down the spines of some universities” – WPI Strategy Director Nick Faith with his view on the Conservative plans to review the funding of tertiary education
- “The vast majority do not end up in decent work, the vast majority do not train anybody in the real sense” – the University and College Union (UCU) calls for a ‘proper’ apprenticeships’ charter
- “That’s the price of half a boiled egg or just one slice of bread with 12 baked beans” – Nick Clegg costs out what the Conservative’s free breakfast will buy
- “Coco Pops v sandwiches is a sideshow. The real issues, even for schools, are welfare and housing. This is what both Parties need to sort out” – Laura McLnerney, Editor of Schools Week, on what’s missing from the main Party Election manifestos
- “Schools policy has effectively been outsourced and none of the manifestos contains a serious proposal to change that” – The TES’s Will Stewart is equally unimpressed with the manifestos
- “There are no big ideas; no evidence either of long-term strategic thinking” – education commentator Peter Tait on the lack of visionary thinking on education in the Party Manifestos
- “It’s something that is essentially a performance job and I think as a profession they’re exhausted” Education Datalab Director Becky Allen on the challenges of being a teacher

Number(s) of the week

- 67 out of 70. How many marks Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party, managed when he took this year’s spelling, punctuation and grammar SATs test as part of his Party’s commitment to abolish all SATs tests
- 54%. How many higher education staff may vote Labour according to a poll conducted by the Times Higher



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- 48%. How many colleges in a recent survey by the Association of Colleges (AoC) expect to see an apprenticeship increase in the coming year
- 80%. The number of people who oppose letting faith schools use faith-based criteria when selecting pupils according to a recent survey reported in the TES
- 78%. The number of primary school children who enjoy reading, the highest level ever recorded according to the latest survey by the National Literacy Trust
- 57%. The number of children and young people in a survey from the charity 'Ditch the Label' who said they had been bullied while playing games online

What to look out for next week

- HE Policy Institute Annual Conference (Wednesday)
- Polling Day (Thursday)