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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 19 May 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

It's been manifesto week out on the campaign trail and the three major Parties have each had a lot to say about education and skills.

The Conservatives in what Michael Gove described as 'a very brave document,' framed their manifesto around five big challenges facing the country: the economy; Brexit; social provision; an ageing society; and changing technology. Most of the education proposals were pitched into the third of these. They included a nod to three current issues: school funding, with an additional billion a year totalling £4bn promised by 2022; the core curriculum, with the 90% EBacc participation target put back to 2025; and teacher recruitment, with loan repayments for working teachers to be scrapped. There were also continued commitments to the mental health Green Paper, Industrial Strategy, T- level developments and apprenticeship quality.

More contentiously, depending on your point of view, were two other commitments, one on the White Paper proposals to transform the school system including through the expansion of free and grammar schools and the other on including international students in immigration totals. Both have been the subject of intense debate but the PM was said to be keen to ensure a mandate for each of them. Less clear but potentially significant, were three other proposals: to improve school accountability at KS3, establish Institutes of Technology and review tertiary funding; each could prove important in their own way.

The most dramatic of Labour's proposals in what Jeremy Corbyn called a 'radical and responsible' manifesto was the commitment to bring back maintenance grants and scrap tuition fees for university students. This was part of a major £25.3bn package of education spending commitments, the largest for any single policy area in a Labour manifesto that also included promises of smaller class sizes in the initial years of primary, a commission on primary assessment, support for the Sainsbury recommendations and apprenticeship developments, and free training provision in FE.

The proposals came as part of what Labour is calling a National Education Service, mirrored on the best principles of the NHS and offering all-through learning from cradle to grave, free at the point of use. The intent may be attractive but a lot will depend on securing the funding required and resolving some of the more intractable areas such as the local ownership and accountability of schools, the nature of a post-Brexit Industrial Strategy and the changing global market for higher education.

Inevitably as the NAHT's Russell Hobby put it, the manifestos offer 'a mixed bag' when it comes to education. Or as Geoff Barton, ASCL general secretary said, "There's good, there's bad and there's woolly." There's certainly been plenty of that.



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## Top headlines this week

- 'Unions call for Parliamentary candidates to pledge extra school cash.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Labour manifesto: plans to let councils run schools dropped.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Lib-Dems pledge £7bn for England's schools.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Schools get five extra years to hit EBacc targets under Tory plans.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Glacial progress exposed for colleges' apprentice delivery.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [Forward Together](#). The Conservatives launched their Election 2017 Manifesto outlining a number of proposals, with education prominent among them, for dealing with what it identified as five major challenges facing the country
- [For the many not the few](#). The Labour Party launched its Election 2017 Manifesto, pledging to work for the many not the few and to invest heavily among other things in education and skills
- [Your chance to change Britain's future](#). The Lib-Dems launched their Election 2017 Manifesto promising an opportunity to change Britain's future by holding the next government to account on such matters as Brexit, NHS, education and the environment
- [Greens on education](#). The Green Party launched its education election manifesto proposing to scrap SATs, end the academies programme and put £7bn into the education budget
- [Labour market projections](#). EY Item Club forecasters predicted a slowdown in the jobs market coupled with continued gloomy prospects on pay but a potential greater interest in skills training in its latest assessment of the UK labour market
- [The pen is mightier](#). The TES reported that Sir Michael Wilshaw's book on lessons learnt from a life in education will be published this autumn

### HE

- [No change](#). The Conservatives committed to include overseas students in immigration totals under its Election Manifesto
- [Free at the point of use](#). The Labour Party promised to restore maintenance grants for university students and scrap university tuition fees in its Election Manifesto
- [Finance healthcheck](#). The Lib-Dems promised a review of HE financing, support for the vocational route and to take international students out of migrant figures as part of its Election Manifesto
- [More rankings](#). The Guardian published its latest (2018) university league table based on factors such as quality of teaching, student satisfaction, employability and spending per student showing Cambridge and Oxford still occupying the top two places, the top ten changing little but some newer unis such as Liverpool Hope and UWE moving up the table



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- **Fees or not.** Universities UK, like many stakeholders, commented on Labour proposals to scrap tuition fees noting that it may not benefit the most needy students and could end up further squeezing future funding levels
- **Principles for the OfS.** The Head of Policy at the Russell Group reflected on Wonkhe about the sorts of principles that should guide the new Office for Students when it becomes operative next year suggesting five in particular including proportionate regulation, student protection and institutional autonomy
- **Welcome mat.** The managing director of Hobsons blogged on the HEPI website about his company's latest International Students' Survey which highlighted continuing global opportunities for UKHE but within the context of an open doors policy

## FE/Skills

- **IoT and T-levels.** The Conservatives pledged to support both Institutes of Technology and T-level developments as part of their Election Manifesto
- **Return of the EMA.** The Labour Party promised to bring back the Education Maintenance Allowance, support apprenticeships and provide for free provision for lifelong as part of its Election Manifesto
- **ILAs.** The Lib-Dems pledged to create Individual Learning Accounts for lifelong learning as well support National Colleges and apprenticeship growth as part of its Election Manifesto
- **Lessons learnt.** Julian Gravatt, Deputy Chief Exec at the AoC reflected on some of the lessons learnt from the two year area review process now that it's drawing to a close arguing that while it's allowed for some strategic re-thinking within the sector, it's also left a number of wider issues unresolved

## Schools

- **Selective schools.** The Conservatives included a promise to encourage more selective schools, subject to conditions, as part of their Election Manifesto
- **Making up the shortfall.** The Labour Party promised in its Election Manifesto to reverse cuts in funding and ensure no school lost out under a new funding formula as part of a £6.3bn investment in schools
- **Core curriculum.** The Lib-Dems promised increased funding, a core curriculum entitlement, more support and training for teachers, and no more grammar schools among the pledges in its Election Manifesto
- **Poor retention.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published the first in what will become a series of reports on teacher retention particularly in core subjects in English secondary schools showing a worryingly high rate of teachers of EBacc subjects leaving after just a few years
- **PISA on well-being.** The OECD's Andreas Schleicher blogged about student well-being and what the latest PISA data revealed about the different approaches and attitudes being adopted across member countries
- **Mental health support.** The UK's first Centre of Excellence for mental health training and professional development of teachers in schools opened at Leeds Beckett University



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## Tweets(s) of the week

- “We’ll keep setting hard exam questions, no matter what students tweet” - [@RichardVaughan1](#) reporting on comments by AQA’s Social Media Manager
- “Teachers pay the price when they stop – often you get to the end of the half-term then you collapse” - [@tes](#)
- “I went to a grammar school- that doesn’t mean I have to support them. Michael Rosen” - [@guardian](#)
- “Cut down carbs and go big on spinach: how to order a healthy student takeaway” - [@guardian](#)

## Other stories of the week

- [Not all going robotic](#). There has been a lot of talk recently about the march of the robots with leading organizations like McKinsey and Reform analyzing how far jobs might become automated in the coming years and even which jobs might disappear altogether. In an interesting article in the FT this week, Sarah O’Connor provided an alternative perspective arguing that some of the fastest growing jobs such as caring in an ageing society require skills and feelings that robots cannot replicate. Her view was that policy makers and professionals should worry less about the jobs that might be going and do more to support the ones that are likely to stay.
- [Strictly for wonks](#). For those who enjoy all the facts and figures about general elections, the House of Commons Library published recently a briefing paper stuffed with facts and figures on UK elections. For example, Labour’s best result in terms of number of seats was in 1997 and its worst was 1983. The Conservative’s worst performance correspondingly was 1997 and its best 1983. These and other details are all in the briefing paper
- [Girl Guide badges](#). Vlogging, app design and festival goer. Some of the badges being suggested for the Girl Guide organization as it seeks to refresh and renew for a modern age

## Quote(s) of the week

- “A clear plan to meet the big challenges we face together” – Theresa May launches the Conservative Party Election Manifesto
- “A programme that will reverse our national priorities to put the interests of the many first” – Jeremy Corbyn launches the Labour Party Election Manifesto
- “What are schools need is hope for the future” – Tim Farron launches the Lib-Dem Party’ Election Manifesto
- “To start off with that as the aim, in a way you’re sort of dooming it” – Alison Wolf on the illusion of parity of esteem
- “As in previous years, we expect to see students letting off steam on social media when they come out of the exam room...that doesn’t necessarily mean there’s a problem with an exam or a particular question” – Ofqual offers a spoiler alert about social media comments ahead of the exam season

## Number(s) of the week

- £4bn. How much extra the Conservatives are promising for school budgets by 2022

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- £25.3bn. How much Labour is pledging for education over the next Parliament
- £7bn. How much extra funding the Lib-Dems are promising schools and colleges over the next Parliament
- 2.7%. UK inflation in April, up 0.4% on the previous month and according to experts likely to peak at 3.0% this year
- 1.54m. UK unemployment figure for the first quarter of 2017, according to the latest official stats, the lowest for 42 years but on the downside with wages slowing
- 68%. The number of organizations planning to recruit in the next three months according to the latest CIPD/Adecco Labour Market outlook
- 3. The maximum hours per day children (5 yr olds) should be watching TV (without having negative effects on their language skills) according to latest research

## What to look out for next week

- TES Education election hustings (Wednesday)