

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 13 February 2015

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly weekly additional service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days and introduced to keep a special 'eye' on developments in the build up to the 2015 election.)

The week summed up

Education funding has become the big battleground in education at the moment.

The Lib-Dems were the first out of the blocks last year claiming that they would protect the early years, schools and 16-19 budgets, a deal that was confirmed by Nick Clegg again this week when he set out his Party's five manifesto priorities. Two weeks ago, the Conservatives laid out their position with the Prime Minister promising that school budgets would not be cut in current cash terms but equally would not necessarily be increased either. Now this week, in his first major education speech of the current campaign, Ed Miliband seems to have gone further claiming that *"the next Labour government will protect the overall education budget...in real terms...every year."* The claim has raised excitement in the FE sector though how far it goes beyond 16-19 and just how much extra money that means is still under scrutiny. Sam Freedman who offered a helpful analysis of Conservative school funding plans last week has done the same for Labour, it's worth taking a **look**.

Much of the rest of the speech involved a tour of Labour's current education hot spots including the case for qualified teachers, a balanced curriculum and high standards for all but there were some eye-catching announcements. Here's a list of four: bringing back compulsory work experience from age 14; granting all head teachers the same powers as academy heads currently have; providing parents with the right to call in the local Director of School Standards if they have concerns; and capping class sizes for 5, 6 and 7 year olds at 30. And a final strapline: *"In the 21st century, world class education isn't a luxury for the individual, it's a necessity."* A clear pitch to a wider audience.

It's been a week of big speeches. David Cameron, Ed Balls, Chuka Umunna and Nick Clegg each took to the floor to address the British Chambers of Commerce in Conference this week, Michael Gove and Nicky Morgan both spoke at the think tank Policy Exchange but perhaps the other speech that deserves a special mention this week, particularly for those in FE, was that by Glenys Stacey, the Chief Executive of Ofqual. The focus was vocational qualifications and how Ofqual as regulator goes about ensuring high standards and quality on the one hand but flexibility and responsiveness (to employer needs) on the other. Ofqual is shortly to launch a consultation on a new framework for adult vocational qualifications and the speech was a timely reminder of the issues. It can be read **here**.

Top headlines this week

- 'Billions more for new schools-despite doubts about speed of work.' (**Monday**)
- 'Exams made easy in race to bottom.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Pupils in some areas are not offered 'vital' GCSEs.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Ed Miliband: Labour government would restore Blair era cap on class sizes.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Labour would protect education funding – Miliband' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Budget 2015, due to take place on 18 March and where we have until the end of today to offer our two penny worth via the Treasury survey
- David Cameron, Ed Balls and Nick Clegg each of whom pitched 'a new industrial policy' to the annual conference of the British Chambers of Commerce
- The government who announced a further £1.3bn to help local authorities plan for extra school places up to 2018
- Labour who promised to resurrect Sure Start centres for use by charities and other organisations working particularly with disadvantaged families and to prioritise school admissions for children being brought up by family members other than their parents
- Nick Clegg who set out the Lib-Dem's five election priorities which included protecting the education budget from cradle to college
- Tuition Fee (Transparency and Accountability) Bill requiring universities to send a letter to students explaining how they are spending the money which was laid before Parliament
- Former HE Minister, John Denham MP who once again called for a rethink on the traditional three year, study away from home university degree model
- Lord Young, the government's Enterprise Adviser, whose latest report on small businesses, noted that more young people were looking to become their own boss as the internet was making it easier for business ideas to be turned into propositions
- Universities UK who published the Gaskell Report proposing a new regulatory body and better protection for students as part of a shake-up of HE regulation
- Sheffield University who are launching a new scheme of bursaries to help disadvantaged graduates find work after they leave
- The University of Brighton which has been chosen to lead the expansion of the 'Troops for Teachers' scheme
- Newvic's (Newham sixth form college) Eddie Playfair who wrote a blog piece dispelling some myths about applying to Russell Group universities after 71% of its class of 2014 went on to such universities last year
- The BIS Dept whose updated version of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) included latest amendments to functional skills and alternatives
- The Skills Funding Agency who published a number of Papers on to the funding rules, rates and formulae for 2015-16
- Ofqual who published its Second Report to Parliament covering its activities between April 2011 and December 2014
- Glenys Stacey, chief executive of Ofqual who announced that Ofqual would be consulting on a new qualification framework for adult Voc Quals in a speech to the Skills Summit
- NIACE who have proposed that £100m of skills and careers funding should be used to create a National Advancement Service to help people with careers advice and job opportunities
- UKCES whose latest report highlights the Catch-22 effect on young people told to get work experience but then finding employers not offering it
- Teacher unions who have written to the government to express their disappointment that the recent Workforce Challenge has failed to tackle the 'root causes' of the problem
- The DfE who published guidance on the latest batch of 2016 GCSEs and AS/A levels
- Ofqual who published the latest set of regulatory arrangements for GCSE History, Geography and Modern foreign languages and AS/A level geography

- OPSN whose research suggested that some learners in deprived areas were being denied opportunities to take more challenging and in many cases, more marketable GCSEs in case schools' league positions looked bad
- Tom Bennett, Director of researchED who questioned some of the theories peddled about teaching styles and called for much more practically-based classroom research instead
- Get fit, climb mountains, take risks, ban computer games: some of the proposals in the Manifesto for Children launched by TV adventurer Bear Grylls

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"CPD Theory No 17: a whole day course is 20% useful input and interactions, 40% stuff we could read, 40% filler/stuff we already know."* @headguruteacher
- *"If you can't tweet anything nice, don't tweet anything at all."* @Telegraph, a head teacher's advice to a celebrity parent tweeter
- *"Criticism makes us stronger: Apple Executive."* @DTelegraph

Acronym(s) of the Week

- NIACE. National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- UKCES. UK Commission for Employment and Skills

Quote(s) of the week

- *"We should always be the eternal warriors for higher standards."* Ed Miliband declares what lies behind Labour's education policies
- *"Children can't learn and teachers can't teach in schools that are cold and have leaking roofs."* The Deputy PM helps announce the extra building money to schools
- *"We've had people claiming that children learn using brain gym, people saying that kids only learn if you appeal to their learning style. There's not a scrap of research that substantiates this."* Tom Bennet Director researchED on current learning myths
- *"Dense, impenetrable and inaccessible."* An English teacher bemoans the inclusion of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde on GCSE English reading lists suggesting it will put young readers off

Number(s) of the week

- 75. The number of MPs who have signed a letter to the Education Secretary calling on her to exempt sixth-form colleges from VAT. (They have to pay but school sixth forms don't)
- £6bn. The amount of money the government has pledged for school buildings over the next three years
- 57%. The number of 11-16 yr olds who have done something risky online according to research released to coincide with this week's Internet Safety Day

What to look out for next week

- Half term