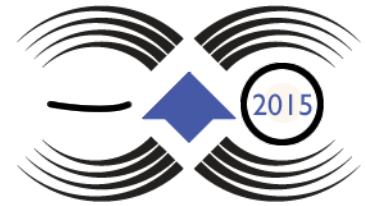


Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 13 March 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

This week the policy focus has been on families and apprenticeships. Each is important politically and politicians from all Parties have been out and about lending support, making announcements and seeking photo opportunities accordingly. So we've had the Skills Minister in full overalls helping a young apprentice plumber unblock a sink as part of National Apprenticeship Week and Ed Miliband photo shopped strolling down the road with his family as Labour extends its credentials on family matters. This is after all the photo selfie election.

It hasn't all been photo glare however. David Cameron used his family-friendly speech at the start of the week to announce, somewhat controversially given the strong views on the subject, a big boost to the Free Schools programme. He may well have been encouraged to do so by a bullish report on Free Schools from the think tank Policy Exchange a few days before which concluded that Free Schools were having a positive effect and that it should be made easier for more to be rolled out. It may also be a matter of expanding school places but either way, the Prime Minister pledged that his Party would open 500 more over the next Parliament and moreover that the current Education Secretary would be there to ensure this would happen. There was a lot more in the speech but if you want it in bite sizes, it's this: jobs, money, homes, schools and savings, these are the five things that the Prime Minister believes families want most and he's determined to deliver them.

As for the other major talking point of the week, apprenticeships, the annual National Apprenticeship Week has provided a major opportunity for all political Parties to establish their credentials. The government launched a series of reports on apprenticeships and traineeships while the Prime Minister was on hand to help announce the roll-out of nine new industry designed Degree Apprenticeships. Labour confirmed its commitment to "*a new universal gold standard for apprenticeships,*" while the Lib-Dems pledged to double the number of employers with apprentices, "*meaning up to 4m new apprentices.*" Away from the headlines, it's the debate about the topping and tailing of the apprenticeship system that's becoming interesting: a clear entry point for young people, either a Young Apprenticeship scheme as the Education Committee suggested or a pre-apprenticeship scheme as the AoC have proposed, and a coherent progression and exit point at the other end through perhaps Higher Apprenticeships, Degree Apprenticeships or Tech Degrees, all with many others have been proposed for this space in recent months. It's a long time since the work-based route attracted such attention.

Top headlines this week

- 'Too few young people becoming apprentices say MPs.' (**Monday**)
- 'Ms U-turn will keep her job insists Prime Minister.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Cameron's £15,000 for maths and science teachers. (**Wednesday**)
- 'Research universities should lead on higher apprenticeships. (**Thursday**)
- 'Teachers' pay rise will spell cuts.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who announced a significant increase in the number of Free Schools as part of a major speech on improving the lives and opportunities for families
- The House of Lords who confirmed that it would set up a committee to look into social mobility and the transition from school to work in the next session of Parliament
- The government who announced a new programme to encourage more people, including career changers and A level students, to take up training and become maths or physics teachers
- The BIS Dept who updated its guidance on the delivery framework for Traineeships and published the results of an evaluation of how the first year of the programme had gone showing that 79% of trainees were happy with their programme and 50% had gone on to an apprenticeship or work
- The BIS Dept who also reported on how the Apprenticeship Reforms and Trailblazers were working and concluded that while some issues about funding, assessment and grading and standards development remain, considerable progress had been made
- The FE and Skills Minister whose latest progress report for the sector sent in a thank-you letter to college governors confirmed that the outcome of the evidence review into non GCSE Eng/maths will be published before the end of the month
- The Education Secretary who announced plans for a new charter mark to be awarded jointly by the DfE and PSHE Association for schools who deliver a so-called 'curriculum for life'
- The Education Committee who urged the government to bring back the Young Apprenticeship scheme as one of a number of recommendations in a report on apprenticeships and traineeships for 16-19 year olds
- The Home Office who issued updated guidance for sponsor institutions applying for the Tier 4 licence needed for recruiting international students
- Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls who in a speech to the RSA challenged the Conservatives over the extent of their proposed cuts in the future
- Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umanna who outlined Labour's 'gold standard' model of apprenticeships (Level 3, 2yrs) in a speech to FE Week's Apprenticeship Conference
- The Lib-Dems who pledged to create 4m new apprenticeships over the lifetime of the next Parliament as they launched their 5-point economic growth plan
- The Taxpayers' Alliance who included scrapping the BIS Dept in its latest 160+ page report on where savings could be made in the future
- Living costs, affordable housing and employment and access to work, the top three priorities of young (18-24) voters in a recent poll. Tuition fees came in at number 6
- The University think tank million+ who called for a university-based professional career framework for teachers as part of a new manifesto for teacher education
- The Times Higher global rankings which saw 12 UK universities in the top 100 and Durham and Warwick in for the first time
- Sir Keith Burnett and Sir Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellors of Sheffield and Warwick universities respectively who sketched out a vision for research intensive universities to help lead a new 'gold standard' higher voc education route leading to 40,000 higher apprenticeships nationally
- Moocs some of which are being made more openly available (without the need for registration) in an 'Open Step Pages' pilot being launched by FutureLearn

- The think tank IPPR who published a collection of essays looking at how European employment trends were changing in response to technology, globalisation and labour movement
- The Sixth Form Colleges Association who argued that unless the funding rate improves many of its colleges will be forced to cut weekly teaching times by a further 7-10 hours
- The think tank Policy Exchange who examined some of the data available on the impact of Free Schools and concluded that the model was sound enough for further expansion
- The National Association of Head Teachers who published an Election Special with each of the main Parties setting out its views
- The professional body ASCL who have worked with the DfE to produce a guide to the current A level reforms
- Ofsted whose latest guidance on school inspections confirmed that schools don't have to undertake a specified amount of lesson observation
- Former government education adviser Sir Alan Steer who in a pamphlet by the New Visions for Education Group, listed four actions needed to improve school standards including focusing on early years and requiring all schools to be in a federation
- Basildon where the town's academy and local authority primary schools have agreed to work together and where standards are now rising to such an extent that it's being seen as a role model
- The DfE who published the names of the members of the new Commission on (primary) assessment and who provoked criticism for not including a classroom-based teacher
- The BBC who announced it would give away Micro-Bit computers to pupils starting secondary school this autumn as part of its Make it Digital campaign
- The Education Endowment Fund who along with Durham University launched an Early Years Toolkit with a list of strategies and resources including early literacy and numeracy but also play-based learning

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"There is not a high road or a low road. They both lead as far as you want them to go. One of them is an apprenticeship."* @NickBoles MP. The Skills Minister helps launch apprenticeship week
- *"A nod towards character education is welcome-just don't go measuring it."* @Schooltruth. Fiona Millar comments on the new found interest in character education
- *10% of teaching time is lost to inadequate technology.'* @brotheruk

Acronym(s) of the Week

- The Slow Education Initiative. A movement dedicated to doing things properly rather than quickly

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Because for us an 'all right' education is not good enough for our children."* The Prime Minister on the thinking behind accelerating the Free School programme
- *"An obsessive, ideological focus on structural change."* The NASUWT respond to the latest announcement about a proposed increase in the number of Free Schools

- "We get vocational education." Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umanna claims Labour gets the importance of voc education

Number(s) of the week

- 256. The number of new Free Schools currently open
- 553. The number of technical and vocational qualifications now approved for school and college performance tables
- 9. The number of new industry designed Degree Apprenticeships announced this week
- 22-25 hours a week. What the Sixth Form Colleges Association reckons is needed to deliver a worthwhile curriculum and which is gradually being eroded by funding cuts
- 2%. What the 'top' teachers may get as a pay rise this year
- 121m. The number of primary and lower-secondary age pupils still not enrolled in educational programmes according to the latest report by UNESCO
- 30%. The number of young people who suggest that social media will in some way inform their voting preference according to a recent Ipsos Mori poll

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee Report on Closing the Gap: the Work of the Committee in the 2010-2015 Parliament (Monday)
- Education Committee Report on the Trojan Horse Affair (Tuesday)
- Budget day. (Wednesday)
- Ofqual Report in 2014 exam appeals (Thursday)

