

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 17 April 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

It's been manifesto week with Labour first out of the stalls on Monday followed in quick succession by most of the other Parties as the week progressed.

The manifestos have come in all shapes and sizes with the Lib-Dems at the moment claiming the prize for the heftiest at 157 pages, and at 70+, the Conservatives listing the most proposals. There have also been some interesting settings for the launches, a UTC in Swindon for the Conservatives and a pub in Essex for UKIP but how much they really tell us and how much they've really changed things is open to question. The polls have changed only marginally during the week and voters have remained at best bemused and at worst disenchanted, leading the commentator Andrew Marr to ponder why it's proving to be '*such a tooth-grindingly awful election.*' His conclusion? "*The Parties have chosen to refuse to tell us what we need to know.*"

How far this relates to education depends on where you start: whether you have an interest in a particular phase of learning or have heard it all before? It's true that a lot of the proposals have been touted around for some time but there are notable points of interest for each sector whether it's Labour's wrap-around childcare, the Conservatives' EBacc condition or the Lib-Dems' funding guarantees. Funding has inevitably featured prominently with the Lib-Dems making a big pitch not just with their cradle-grave funding protection but also for the prospect of extra funding in the second half of the next Parliament if growth continues. However as the Institute of Fiscal Studies has reminded us, further cuts are inevitable and even protected areas could suffer from rising costs in areas like staffing and pensions so a sense of perspective helps.

As to what stands out? From the Conservatives it's probably the requirements for 11 yr olds to retake tests, for secondary schools to take EBacc subjects to ensure an Outstanding Ofsted grade, for the scrapping of more 'low-level' provision and the use of more performance data for FE and for a quality framework for HE. For Labour, it's the return of the extended school model at primary, the focus on teacher professional development, schools standards and vocational learning at secondary, the creation of specialist Technical Institutes and pursuit of English and maths in FE and the cut in tuition fees and development of the tech degree route in HE. The Lib-Dems would no doubt point to their commitment to the Pupil Premium, their focus on a core curriculum and parental guarantee for schools, their Young Person's Discount Card for 16-21 year olds and their pledge to establish a review of HE finance sometime in the next Parliament.

The TES has revealed this morning that Labour has the teachers' vote although in fairness, there's a strong body of support for the Conservatives as well. Everything still to play for.

Top headlines this week

- 'Half of schools short of teachers in core subjects.' (**Monday**)
- 'Hothousing and testing violate children's rights.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Lib-Dems pledge £2.5bn for education.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Thousands of children miss out on primary school places.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Miliband pledge to end long-term unpaid internships.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Conservatives who confirmed proposals to protect per-pupil funding for 5-16 yr olds, introduce resit tests for 11 year olds, support the importance of core subjects in schools, create FE National Colleges and 3m apprenticeships, and introduce a new framework for 'high-quality' HE teaching, in their manifesto
- Labour who underlined proposals in their manifesto for protected budget funding for 2-19 yr olds, maximum class sizes in primary, fully qualified and trained teachers, a 'gold-standard' vocational route and a reduction in HE tuition fees to £6000
- The Lib-Dems who pledged to put education at their heart of their manifesto and back it with protected funding for 2-19 yr olds and with additional money from any economic growth evident from 2017/18
- The Green Party whose manifesto included plans to scrap SATs, league tables, Ofsted and HE tuition fees but did include proposals to increase funding for each sector
- UKIP whose manifesto included proposals to scrap KS1 tests, cut teacher workloads, support grammar schools, abolish the AS level, improve voc education and stop tuition fee loans to EEA students
- The Institute of Fiscal studies who provided a further useful report on how the three major Party's spending plans for schools were shaping up; link [here](#)
- Sir Anthony Seldon who has been appointed as Vice-Chancellor of Buckingham University from this September
- TES Global whose acquisition of Australian company UniJobs will bring together an extensive global network of university opportunities
- Gordon McKenzie, Deputy Director for HE strategy/policy at BIS who will take over as chief executive of Guild HE from July
- The FE Trust for Leadership which released its first publication and announced its second round of bids under its grants programme
- Three East London colleges (Newham, Tower Hamlets and Redbridge) who, as more cuts loom, are getting together to share some resources and facilities
- The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) who are drawing up a 10-point plan to help overcome teacher recruitment concerns
- The Sutton Trust who published a Social Mobility Index for parliamentary constituencies in England highlighting best and worst for improving social mobility for young people
- Tackle behaviour, strengthen teaching, conduct regular assessment, provide high-quality experience; four steps to be taken in in order if you have to turn a school round according to a head who has been there, seen it and done it
- Tim Oates who set out to debunk some of the myths still perpetuated about the Finnish education system such as there is no inspection system and there are no private schools: there is and there area, but different
- Primary school parents who have been finding out this week if their offspring have gained places at their preferred primary school from this September
- "Which five-letter word means a stupid or silly woman in Mexican Spanish, a university canteen in German and in the English-speaking world an organisation founded in 1946 for people with high IQs?" One of 10 started questions answered correctly by the captain of the winning team on this year's University Challenge (Answer: Mensa)

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Mediocre failures? My children are simply being what they are."* @ssat
- *"College of Teaching has no benefit to profession says union."* @tes
- *"Labels are for jam jars not children."* @osirisedu
- *"How did we get to a point where 'we'll ensure good primary schools' is the pinnacle of school policy?"* @miss_mcinerney

Acronym(s) of the Week

- FETL. The Further Education Trust for Leadership, an independent charity and think tank set up to help share and develop leadership in the FE sector

Quote(s) of the week

- *"The next five years are about turning the good news in our economy into a good life for you and your family."* David Cameron on the good life as he launched his Party's manifesto
- *"I do not offer a government that tries to carry on from where the last Labour government left off."* Ed Miliband on a new beginning as he launched his Party's manifesto
- *"The Liberal Democrats will add a heart to a Conservative government and a brain to a Labour one."* Nick Clegg on winning hearts and minds as he launched his Party's manifesto
- *"Our position is perfectly clear; we want our country back."* Nigel Farage on being clear as he launched his Party's manifesto
- *"Last time round it was a piece of cake compared to what might happen this time."* Former Cabinet Secretary Gus O'Donnell on how difficult Coalition arrangements might be this time
- *"Further education is a Rubik's cube of a thing, adept at dealing with colourful twists, turns and about-turns in policies, purses, politicians and partners."* Dame Ruth Silver in her introduction to the first publication from the FE Trust for Leadership

Number(s) of the week

- £7bn. How much the Conservatives are promising for 'good' school places during the next Parliament
- 70,000 teachers and 10,000 learning assistants. How much the Lib-Dems claim their extra cash for schools is worth
- 74 and 52. The number of pledges in the Conservative and Labour manifestos respectively
- 157. The number of pages in the Lib-Dem manifesto making it the largest by far so far

What to look out for next week

- SNP manifesto launch (Monday)