

## Policy Eye: Election 2015



### Highlights of week ending Friday 19 September 2014

*(Welcome to Policy Eye, a new 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 in a word

While much of the media has been gripped by developments in Scotland this week, there's been plenty going on in the world of education. Four main themes have emerged. First the continuing issue about financing student numbers in HE, buoyant this year and set to increase again next year as the numbers cap is lifted but where questions about fee levels and costs have been raised in an interesting open letter by former Universities Minister David Willetts to the Shadow Universities Minister and where the HE Policy Institute has published a useful Paper on what lifting the cap actually means and costs. All eyes will now be on Ed Miliband next Tuesday afternoon when he takes the stage at the Labour Conference to see if he drops any hints; present thinking is that he won't. Second, and another long-running story: English and maths, where three days after the charity National Numeracy called for "*radical measures for improving maths skills*," a couple of FE workforce surveys highlighted concerns about the levels of maths skills in the sector. The new bursaries and incentives for FE maths teachers clearly can't come soon enough. Third, Ofsted who in advance of their own consultation next month, have started considering some changes already, including notably the use of some no-notice inspections in schools. And fourth and finally, it's impossible to leave this week without considering the implications of the Scottish referendum south of the border where interest is growing in giving big city regions greater control over the provision of services such as education and skills training. Momentum is likely to build and it will be interesting to keep a tab on the number of times the word 'decentralisation' is mentioned at the Party Conferences over the next three weeks.

#### Top headlines this week

- 'Universities ignoring laddish culture says NUS leader.' (**Monday**)
- 'Shame celebrities who boast about poor maths, says numeracy charity.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Academy regulation 'too weak' says MPs' report.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Cash warning for university expansion.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Ofsted may end focus on English and maths in primary inspections.' (**Friday**)

#### People/organisations in the news this week

- The Education Secretary who held her first full meeting with the teacher unions
- The Government who responded to an earlier Education Committee Inquiry into white, working-class kids and appeared unconvinced that parachuting specialist teachers into disadvantaged schools would help raise performance levels

- David Willetts who wrote an open letter to Labour's Universities Minister on the eve of Labour's Annual Conference urging him not to take the plunge and reduce tuition fees
- The Shadow Education Secretary who pledged to set up a new negotiating body to ensure support staff in schools got a fair wage in future
- Cambridge, Imperial, Oxford and UCL who were all included in the top six global universities in the latest QS world rankings
- The HE Policy institute (HEPI) who highlighted some unanswered questions still hanging over the proposed lifting of the student numbers cap in HE next year
- The charity National Numeracy who launched a seven point manifesto to help change attitudes and improve numeracy levels in school and adult learning
- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) and Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) who published some damning statistics about the qualification levels of current English and maths teachers in FE
- The think tank ResPublica who joined in the current devo-dash by proposing that a city region such as Greater Manchester should be given full control over the provision of services like education and skills training
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) who reported a significant drop to 747,000 in the number of young people (16-24 yr olds) listed as unemployed in its latest (May-July) stats
- Teach First who came 2<sup>nd</sup> (behind PwC) in the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers
- Ofsted who published a new best practice report for FE, announced a new wave of two-day no notice inspections for schools and mulled over further potential revisions to inspection procedures
- Ofqual who agreed to retain speaking and listening in assessments for the new GCSEs in Languages
- The Institute of Education and London Centre for Leadership in Learning who produced a report for MPs looking at where areas of conflicts of interest can occur in Academy trusts
- School Inset days which were widely condemned in an event organised by the NAHT
- Marks and Spencer who joined up with Leeds university to launch not just any course but a new online Mooc on business innovation

### Tweet of the week

- *"I have a first class degree in pure maths. Why can I not understand my gas and electricity bill?" @oldandrewuk*

### Quote of the week

- *"If you get into government it will cause you no end of grief."* David Willetts warns the Shadow Universities Minister of the likely outcome if Labour decides to go for a pledge to reduce tuition fees

### Number of the week

- 40. The number of schools likely to face an unannounced Ofsted inspection over the next couple of weeks

- 19. The number of UK universities in the top 100 of latest QS World University Rankings, a record for the UK

### **What to look out for next week**

- Shadow Education Minister Tristram Hunt addresses the Labour Party Conference (Sunday)
- Ed Miliband's gives the Leader's Speech to the Labour Party Conference (Tuesday)
- Ofqual publishes its latest 'Perceptions of (Qualifications) Report (Tuesday)
- Submissions close for the Edge 'young entrepreneurs' Challenge (Friday)