

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 20 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

It's been Budget Week of course and with Parliament now just one week away from dissolution and the launch of the election campaign proper, there's been a lot of interest in what sort of Budget it would turn out to be. The Chancellor of course promised 'no giveaways and no gimmicks' and in the event there weren't many surprises either.

The headlines have been full of the Budget and its implications this week with the Institute of Fiscal Studies and its Post-Budget **Briefing** emerging by common consent as the real winner. Their analysis of what is fast becoming the core issue at present, namely the extent of proposed cuts in the next Parliament and what impact these might have on public services is worth reading and can be found [here](#). The Chancellor has argued that graphic stories of 'deep cuts' are off beam and that "we want to take a more balanced approach and would not put all the cuts in government depts." That may well be true and may offer some succour to FE whose Dept faces some of the biggest cuts but as the IFS concludes, until we know exactly where the cuts are to come from, it's difficult to be sure. Elsewhere, Fraser Nelson's 'Budget 2015 explained in ten graphs' offers another interesting and easy to read perspective on the key Budget issues. It's published in the Spectator and can be found [here](#).

As for education, summarised in an accompanying Policy Watch one-pager, it hardly featured at all. Schools may have been interested in the Budget's big book comments on balancing out efficiencies and cost measures, FE may have been interested in the Apprenticeship Voucher and local growth announcements, while HE may have been interested in the postgrad funding and science and innovation statements but 'may' is the operative word given detail in each case was pretty sparse. It's the Spending Review later this year that will bring us the detail.

So with many of the commentators acknowledging that we're in for 'a rollercoaster ride' with the nation's finances one way or another, the Education Committee's valedictory **Report**, one of a large number of Reports out this week, offers another rollercoaster ride, this time through education over the last five years. It looks like we're heading for some bumpy rides.

Top headlines this week

- 'Funding gap costs poorest funded schools 40 teachers.' (**Monday**)
- 'Margaret Hodge not confident public funds safe in private colleges' scheme. (**Tuesday**)
- 'Teacher stress levels in England soaring, data shows.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Almost half of English universities plan to recruit more students after cap is lifted.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Hunt wants overseas innovators for England's schools.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Chancellor who encouraged Britain to walk tall as he issued his sixth Budget Statement
- The Leader of the Opposition who argued that the Budget would exacerbate Britain's problems rather than solve them
- Danny Alexander who presented an 'alternative' Lib-Dem Budget the day after the Budget promising a fairer way to cut the debt by squeezing more money out of tax evasion
- Nick Clegg who told his Party's Spring Conference that his two proudest achievements in education were protecting the schools budget and introducing the Pupil Premium
- Margaret Hodge, chair of the Public Accounts Committee, who recommended that a close eye be kept on funding for alternative providers in HE as the Committee concluded its second witness session on the matter
- Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt, calling for a new approach to curriculum reform and for education innovators across the world to come and set up schools in England
- The Competition and Marketing Authority who published guidance for HE providers and students on their rights and responsibilities under consumer law including for example, the importance of providing 'clear, accurate and timely information'
- The Education Committee who published a summary report reflecting on its achievements over the lifetime of this Parliament and in particular its work on helping to close the attainment gap between the most and the least disadvantaged young people
- The 'Trojan Horse' affair, the subject of a summary report by the Education Committee which called for much greater co-ordination between agencies overseeing schools
- University costs, the subject of a global survey by HSBC which reported that Warsaw and Lisbon Universities respectively were the top two 'cheapest' European places to study
- Digital vouchers, being introduced by the government to help simplify the funding regime for "apprenticeships and to give employers greater purchasing powers
- Getting better at managing their own money and spotting good deals, the main reasons why people want to improve their numeracy skills according to research commissioned by the charity National Numeracy
- Jan Hodges who is to step down next month as chief executive of Edge, the body that promotes practical and vocational learning,
- The Institute of Fiscal studies who examined how school funding had been distributed over the last two decades and found that much of it had helped fuel a rise in non-teaching staff
- The College of Teaching for which the Prime Minister promised to provide financial backing
- Enrichment vouchers, proposed in a report commissioned by the Sutton Trust as a way of helping disadvantaged young people gain the sort of extra-curricular experiences that more advantaged young people often enjoy
- One-stop services, online tools and extra help in schools, among the recommendations in a government commissioned report on improving mental health services for young people
- The professional body ASCL, holding its annual conference this weekend and calling for a national fair funding formula
- The think tank Civitas who published a book of essays looking at the diverse and sometimes arcane system of secondary school admissions
- The Compass 'Group' whose final Report into a new system of education called for a more expansive vision of education that enables the potential in individuals to be unleashed

- Science in schools, the subject of a worrying report by the CBI and Brunel University suggesting that in primary at least, science has become less of a priority with over 30% of schools not providing the recommended two hours of science education a week
- CfBT and the British Council whose latest report on language trends in schools found that, as with science (above,) time for language teaching was in danger of being squeezed
- GCE and GCSE Dance, Music and PE for which the latest subject guidance and regulations were published by Ofqual
- *'Would you support all teachers being qualified?'* One of a number of questions asked of UKIP's education spokesman in the Guardian's series inviting questions of each of the Party's education reps. (The answer: *'if I had the choice whether my kids were taught by an outstanding but unqualified teacher with 20 yrs experience or a borderline NQT, I'd choose the former'*)
- Professional passports, what teachers in Wales will be given to record their professional development
- Middle leader positions along with Special Needs, the posts that schools often find the most difficult to fill according to research by NAHT Edge
- King's Leadership Academy in Warrington, announced this week as the winner of the top award for helping develop pupil character
- A new online tool, funded by the DfE, which is to be developed to help schools search for and recruit the governors they need
- Tests for four year olds, criticised by early years experts in a letter to the DfE calling for teacher-based assessments to be used instead
- Early years provision and funding, the subject of a major new report from the Nuffield Foundation and the subject of a new 5-point programme intended to test out new approaches
- *"Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none."* One of the favourite Shakespearean quotes (from *All's Well That Ends Well*) cited by teachers during this week's Shakespeare Week

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"David Cameron: I don't spend enough time going to parents' evenings."* @TelegraphNews
- *"Nicky Morgan: Being academic isn't enough in the modern world."* @Schools Improve
- *"Stop looking for heroic principals, says leadership expert."* @TES
- *"I'm a recruiter and I couldn't navigate all the 350,000 job websites. How can we expect young people with no careers advice to?"* @Schools Week

Acronym(s) of the Week

- DDCED. The DfE's Due Diligence and Counter Extremism Division which the Education Committee recommended in a report this week should be given a higher profile
- SGOSS. The Governors for Schools Organisation who with the Employers' Taskforce, are founding members of the Inspiring Governors Alliance

Quote(s) of the week

- "We produced more than 30 reports and held nearly 200 evidence sessions as we sought to recommend changes to government policy that would help close the gap." The chair of the Education Committee reflects on their work over the last five years
- "If the last five years were about doing what was necessary, I want the next five to be about doing what is possible." Nick Clegg rallies the troops at the Lib-Dems Spring Conference
- "Employers must be in the driving seat when it comes to apprenticeship funding, so we welcome the announcement of the voucher system but await further details." The CBI director-general on the proposed new funding system for apprenticeships
- "A challenge." Getting 16 yr olds and above interested in studying languages according to the latest languages survey by CfBT and the British Council

Number(s) of the week

- 2.5%. The growth forecast for the UK for 2015, up .1% on the previous prediction
- 1.86m. The number of people out of work in the UK in the three months up to Jan 2015 (743,000 in the case of young people aged 16-24) leaving the number in work at an all-time high
- 1 in 10. The number of 5-16 year olds suffering from a mental disorder according to latest government research
- £4,208. What an average secondary school in the lowest funded part of the country will get per pupil next year compared to £6,297 for a school in the highest funded area according to research by ASCL
- Just over 3%. How many exam grades in the summer 2014 series were changed following an appeal, according to a report from Ofqual
- £6.70. What the new hourly National Minimum Wage will be from Oct 2015, up 3%

What to look out for next week

- Government response to the Education Committee Report on Academies and Free Schools (Monday)
- Skills Minister Nick Boles helps launch the new Centre for Vocational Education Research (Tuesday)
- Reform seminar with Alison Wolf on the role of second chance education (Tuesday)
- Final session in this Parliament of Prime Minister's Question Time (Wednesday)
- Pearson/Policy Exchange event with Alan Milburn on Education's role in promoting Social Mobility (Thursday)
- Potential Sky TV interview session with David Cameron and Ed Miliband (Thursday)