

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 28 November 2014

(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 in a word (or two)

There are some big speeches on at the moment. There's the Prime Minister's speech today on the EU and immigration, there's the Chancellor's big moment next week as he announces his fifth, and for this Parliament at least, his final Autumn Statement and there are the three 'big' education speeches this week.

First out of the blocks was the Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt who went for the jugular in a keynote speech on Tuesday on what he called '*the corrosive divide*' between private and state schools. Earlier this year, Michael Gove had described a Berlin Wall existing between the respective school systems and called for this to be removed but Tristram Hunt went further and pledged that '*the next Labour government will introduce a new Schools Partnership Standard that will require all state-subsidised private schools to form a hard-edged partnership with state schools.*' The speech provoked some strong headlines but left no one in any doubt that he meant business.

Next, two days later, came the Schools Minister David Laws, who in a keynote speech to a think tank gave his verdict, not all of it complementary, on the last few years of educational change, before pitching the Lib-Dem education tent around six priorities for the future. These included a revolution in early years education, support for a new Royal College of Teaching, cradle-college funding and perhaps most prominently: an Education Standards Authority, "*to reduce political interference in education.*" The point was sharply made.

Rounding things off this week has been the Education Secretary who set out her vision for education in a speech yesterday in Birmingham. The message of this speech can perhaps be captured as: not for turning but not for ideological confrontation either. In other words, the reforms go on but let's all work together to ensure they deliver. '*Education is a partnership, not a battle or a war.*' It's perhaps worth remembering as things hot up.

Top headlines this week

- 'Universities that fail should be punished, says Which?' (**Monday**)
- 'Apprentices beat graduates in jobs race.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Degree apprenticeships launched to boost hi-tech skills.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Weak academies need better supervision says Laws.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Are performance descriptors levels by another name?' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who saw her vision for education as a joint venture in which all partners: schools, businesses, parents, communities, work together to help young people
- Schools Minister David Laws who called for clearer inspection and accountability arrangements for academies in a speech to the thinktank CentreForum this week
- Ed Vaizey, the Digital Economy Minister, who announced a range of new digital courses including Degree Apprenticeships to help boost digital skills in the workforce
- The DfE who published guidelines for state and independent schools on how to embed British values
- The DfE whose latest statistical release on initial teacher training numbers suggested that more first-class graduates than ever were training to become teachers
- The BIS Dept who channelled more money through LEPs to help small businesses increase their digital presence
- Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt who used a keynote speech this week to condemn the divide between private and state schools and pledged that a Labour government would introduce new partnership arrangements
- The CBI who submitted its thoughts to the Chancellor ahead of his Autumn Statement with a package of measures around local growth, infrastructure, tax credits
- Professor Paul Wellings, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong who compared and contrasted the English and Australian HE systems in the Annual HEPI Lecture
- The consumer magazine Which? who published its latest survey of student views which raised questions about value for money, regulation and protection of student interests
- The QAA who released figures for 2013 showing that 91% of alternative HE providers are making good progress in quality and standards
- The Institute of Education which becomes the UCL Institute of Education when it merges with UCL from next week
- Dame Julia Goodfellow, Vice-Chancellor of Kent University who becomes UUK President from 2015
- The UK Commission for Employment and Skills who published a major report on the UK skills system with five recommendations for a greater employer/employment led system
- Ofsted who published a guidance sheet setting the record straight on what it was looking for in FE inspections
- Sir Tim Brighouse who called for 'three key changes to Ofsted: it should focus on collecting reliable evidence on performance; it should provide independent evidence to government; schools should be graded on the basis of their own self-evaluation
- The Browne Jackson/ASCL second annual survey of school leaders which found that 71% of secondary school leaders were looking to cut costs over the school year
- The President of the Girls' Schools Association who used her opening address at the Association's Annual Conference to highlight '*the unforgiving nature*' of the current education system
- Schools in Finland who in a move to reflect the laptop age will teach typing rather than handwriting skills from autumn 2016
- The Education and Employers Taskforce who published a guide for primary schools working with employers and volunteers as part of the Primary Futures project

- The Teaching Schools Council who together with Sir John Dunford produced a new guide to help schools review their pupil premium strategy

Tweet of the week

- *'If tinkering by well-meaning Ministers were enough to raise educational standards, Britain's schools would lead the world. FT'* @pwatsonmomtrose
- *'Nine year olds should recite times tables by heart says Schools Minister.'* @schoolsimprove

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Bluntly, we need to be nicer to teachers and to invest more in them."* School Minister David Laws
- *"Education for me is about so much more than perfect scores."* The President of the Girls' Schools Association
- *"It baffles me that we can have private schools loaning a sports pitch to the local comprehensive once or twice a year yet completely refusing to play them at football."* Shadow education Secretary Tristram Hunt
- *"The workplace is changing at a faster rate than it has ever done."* Sir Charlie Mayfield, Chair of the John Lewis Partnership and UKCES

Number(s) of the week

- 10%. The number of UK employers who actually employ apprentices according to figures quoted in the latest UKCES Report
- 55%. The number of school leaders, both primary and secondary, who were looking to reduce costs over the coming academic year
- £20.36. The amount the average Briton will spend (typically on fast food, drink or retail therapy) to make themselves feel better after 'a bad day at home or office'

What to look out for next week

- Parliamentary Questions to the Education Secretary (Monday)
- The Chancellor's Autumn Statement (Wednesday)
- Education Committee witness session with the Education Secretary on the exams system (Wednesday)