

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 6 February 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

The election bandwagon moved on to education this week but has not strayed far from familiar ground namely school standards; youth training and skills are topics for the future while HE remains gripped by contortions over tuition fees.

Education was the fourth in the list of six core election themes announced by the Prime Minister at the start of the year and it's perhaps been a welcome relief to move on to a new topic after both sides had battered themselves to a standstill over the economy and health but whether we've learnt anything particularly new remains debatable.

Arguably three themes stand out. First, how to raise standards, particularly if as the Education Secretary announced *'we want to be one of the top five performing countries worldwide for English and maths by 2020?'* Labour has already put its weight behind a fully trained and qualified teaching profession, the Conservatives it seems are going for widespread academisation, upping the ante so that not just inadequate schools as judged by Ofsted but also those requiring improvement as well could be converted to academy status. It's a proposition that raises all sorts of questions about the future funding, accountability and management of the school system. Second, schools are going to face the pinch when it comes to funding. The Prime Minister promised flat cash protection for 5-16 year olds but as others were quick to point out, when you factor in pension, pay, NI and possible inflation increases over the next five years that means a cut. And third, the battle for the Gove legacy continues. Nicky Morgan may have poo-pooed the idea that he was a back seat driver and one of his favoured standards mechanisms, the HE A' level Advisory Board may have been stood down but as indicated, the academies movement is alive and well and driven by a familiar script of a *'war on mediocrity.'*

In another busy week for education, developments in two other parts of the education world deserve a mention. One is apprenticeships, a big priority for all Parties and the subject of an Opposition-led debate this week. As with schools, the argument here is equally about standards and whether as Labour believe apprenticeships should be aligned with the European model and pitched at level 3. The debate didn't change things but we're just under a month away from National Apprenticeship Week so expect to see an increase in policy activity in this area in coming weeks. And the other is HE, not just the fees issue which continues to rumble on but the wider future of UKHE which amongst other topics has been under discussion at this week's annual HEFCE Conference. One aspect of this is the potential impact or not of technology on learning in HE and whether like music, it will become 'unbundled' and individually purchased on different platforms. An interesting article appeared on this recently; it's worth a [look](#)

Top headlines this week

- 'Lowering tuition fees' implausible' say vice-chancellors.' (**Monday**)
- 'Cameron challenged on 'no cuts' school funding promise.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Ofsted to press ahead with A' level science reforms despite criticisms.' (**Wednesday**)

- 'Students subjected to unfair course changes.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Teacher workload crisis: ministers unveil plans to tackle excessive hours.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who confirmed that education funding for ages 5-16 would continue to be protected after the election but left concerns that this would not necessarily take into account increases in inflation, NI, pension and other costs
- The Education Secretary who pledged to stop major mid-year policy changes as part of a new deal with teachers unveiled in response to the recent workforce Challenge
- The Labour Party who pledged "*the biggest devolution of economic power and funding to England's regions over five years*" including funding for skills training
- The Lib-Dems who claimed to have blocked eight of Michael Gove's more 'ideological' plans in a 13-page dossier entitled 'The Gove Files'
- The NHS, living costs and family care: the three issues topping female voter concerns according to a poll by Radio 4's Woman's Hour
- 20 university vice-chancellors who supported a letter to The Times challenging Labour's reported plans to cut the maximum HE tuition fee from £9000 to £6000
- The HE Funding Council who launched their latest Business Plan at their annual conference this week highlighting research, T/L, access and regulation/reputation as key pointers
- The HE Policy Institute who published a book of essays from different institutions of how they are tackling the issue of demonstrating value for money to students and others
- The University of Bath which emerged as the most searched for uni last year in the Complete University Guide followed closely by Cambridge, UCL, Durham and Warwick
- HE Student numbers which according to research by **The Times**, have varied considerably across universities following the introduction of tuition fees
- Loyals, Stayers, Returners and Incomers, four types identified in HECSU's analysis of graduate migration trends. (Loyals for instance remain in their home patch for both study and work while returners move away to study but return afterwards to seek employment)
- NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion who announced they'd be joining forces this week to create a new united voice on economic growth and social inclusion
- The Excellence Gateway, the website offering 'unrivalled' resources for the learning and skill sector, which was re-launched by the Education and Training Foundation
- The Local Government Association who called for more 'good' school places and provision for young unemployed people in its Manifesto wish-list
- 'Claim Your College,' the coalition of groups supporting the creation of a College of Teaching who launched their proposals this week
- Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT who raised strong questions about the independence of the proposed College of Teaching
- The think tank Demos whose analysis of the latest league tables indicated that the attainment gap between pupils on free school meals and their peers was widening and that spending under the pupil premium was having little effect
- Ofsted who confirmed following recent consultation that it would go ahead with more frequent but shorter inspections and with a common inspection framework

- Ofqual who confirmed that it intended to press ahead with its planned changes to science practicals at A level and launched consultations on Dance, Music, Art/Design and Ancient Languages
- Better discipline and smaller classes, the top two proposals for raising school standards in a poll of voters by YouGov
- The Independent Schools Council who published its Manifesto for the election calling for traditional stereotypes of toffs and top hats to be abandoned
- The government who announced a new UTC will open next year in Hull specialising in engineering and to be named the Ron Dearing UTC after one of its favourite 'sons'
- Professor Robin Alexander who published a considerably re-tweeted [blog](#) reflecting on the government's recent enthusiasm for developing pupil character and true grit
- Hodder Education, NFER and Durham CEM, three of the six providers approved to offer reception baseline assessments from Sept 2015
- The University of East Anglia (UEA) where a 'nap nook' for students has been opened in the Students Union for stressed students in need of a 40 minute nap break
- Roddy Doyle, Jojo Moyes, Sophie Hannah, Fanny Blake, Adele Geras and James Bowen whose books have all been added to the Quick Read list of books intended to encourage more adults to read

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"I shot from bottom to top set for maths. My inability to cope with mental arithmetic has no bearing on my overall intelligence."* @hannahfearn
- *"It's no good hanging on to students who aren't going to get anything out of their schools, says Lord Baker."* @tesfenews
- *"Flashes of steel from Glenys Stacey of Ofqual rejecting criticism of changes to science practicals."* @GregHurstTimes

Acronym(s) of the Week

- HECSU. Higher Ed Careers Service Unit
- NCTL. National College of Teaching and Leadership

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Were this to happen, at least £10bn of additional public funding would need to be found and ring-fenced over the course of the next parliament to close the gap."* A group of vice-chancellors writes to The Times to explain why it opposes Labour plans to cut HE tuition fees
- *"No one talks about firing surgeons if a single operation does not succeed."* The general secretary of NAHT on government proposals to remove head teachers of primary schools in which children fail to reach required standards in English and maths
- *"In many ways Ofqual shares the ethos of Tomorrow's World. We want GCSE and A level students to be excited by science."* The chief executive of Ofqual defends the changes to A level science practicals
- *"The manifesto and website contain more recognisable names than a Debrett's guide."* Renowned head teacher Geoff Barton on the need to keep the College of Teaching in the hands of the profession

Number(s) of the week

- 71%. The % of parents who have helped their children with university costs with 53% who have helped with the fees and 20% with clearing the debt according to a YouGov poll
- £70. The potential annual membership fee for the proposed new College of Teaching
- 31%. The number of prospective parliamentary candidates who stand a good chance of winning in 2015 and who have had a private education and according to Sutton Trust research. (The current figure for MPs is 33% and for the population as a whole, 7%)
- 69%. The number of people apparently tempted to take last Monday off (Feb 2 is generally known as National Sickie Day)

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee witness session with Charlie Taylor of the NCTL (Wednesday)