

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 9 January 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 2015 general election campaign kicked off in earnest this week and already there are signs of consumer fatigue. "The election campaign is only one week old and I'm bored already" tweeted one commentator; "could Dave Smashey and Ed Nicey please play some new tunes?" blogged the RSA's Matthew Taylor, himself a former adviser at Number 10. Part of the problem is that the build-up seems to have been going for a long time and part is that so much of the early skirmishing has been predictable: the Conservatives challenging Labour on the economy and Labour challenging the Conservatives on the NHS, 'wealth v health' as The Sun neatly summarised it. Matthew Taylor's conclusion was that: "both major Parties are stuck with messages which are failing to reach beyond their core constituencies" which suggests intriguingly that this will be an election in which the minority Parties (UKIP, SNP, Greens and so on) rather than the majority ones will be the ones to keep an eye out for. We'll be following with interest.

Away from the election, there have been a limited number of education developments this week.

The Education Secretary appeared before the Education Committee to answer questions on careers guidance but gave very little away, alternative HE providers got together to announce a new mission group, the Education Endowment Foundation launched a new interactive tool to help groups of similar schools work together to close the attainment gap and the Schools Minister worried that school pupils today would fail to recognise the importance of some of the great historical anniversaries which fall this year such as the signing of Magna Carta. So far, so expected. One theme, however, beginning to gain traction and which may be worth noting as election noises get louder, is just what role politicians should play in education reform in the future. As Sir David Bell's keynote speech today seems to be suggesting: if for no other reason than economic necessity, politicians should row back from constant reform and let the professionals get on with it. A positive message on which to start election year.

Top headlines this week

- 'Universities refuse to reveal how they spend students' £9,000 fees.' (**Monday**)
- 'Ofsted inspectors must stay out of politics, say Labour.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'School collaboration could help close the attainment gap.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Private providers create 'Russell Group' of the alternative sector.'" (**Thursday**)
- 'The next twelve months will be critical for the future of colleges.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- YouGov whose latest figures suggest that voters are split over which of the two main Parties is best suited to handling education

- The Prime Minister and Chancellor who began a planned regional campaign by heading up to the North West to launch a six-point long-term economic plan which would see among other things a boost to science, business, innovation and education in that region
- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who confirmed in a rather mundane Committee session on careers guidance that the new independent careers company, announced just before Christmas, would be up and running in March
- Ed Miliband who launched Labour's 2015 election campaign with a keynote speech setting out the Party's five key messages including one on better education and opportunities for young people
- Shadow Education Minister, Tristram Hunt, who called for Ofsted to focus on inspecting school performance and not to become engaged in looking at things outside its remit
- The Lib-Dems who announced their campaign team for the general election and celebrated Nick Clegg's 48th birthday with a list of 48 'good things Nick has done'
- 95 leading economists, who predicted in the annual FT survey of economic prospects for the year ahead that UK borrowing and taxes would rise in 2015
- The DfE which invited applications for the new DfE Character Awards
- Sir James Dyson who labelled Theresa May's proposed plans to send home non EU international students once they had graduated as 'mean-spirited' days before the plans were dropped
- University UK whose expert panel reviewing student funding and due to report before the election, published an interim paper outlining emerging lines so far
- The OECD's Andreas Schleicher who blogged about how different countries were tackling the issue of higher ed financing and concluded by praising the approach adopted in England
- The IOE and AELP who launched phase two of the Teach Too Programme designed to encourage industry experts to offer their expertise in vocational teaching and learning
- John Cridland, the Director-General of the CBI who questioned the long-term future of the GCSE in his New Year message
- Sir David Bell, vice-chancellor of Reading University and former permanent secretary at the DfE, who joined the calls for an independent curriculum body to help take some of the politicking out of education reform
- Russell Hobby who was elected as General Secretary of the NAHT for a second term
- The Education Endowment Foundation who launched a new interactive tool to help 'families' of schools come together to help close attainment gaps
- The Wellcome Trust, one of a number of leading bodies, who signed a letter calling on Ofqual to review proposals to change the assessment of GCSE science practicals (Ofqual's consultation on the matter closes on 4 Feb 2015)
- School wellbeing, the subject of a report out from Nuffield Health and 2020health which will see the first head of well-being appointed to a (yet to be selected) secondary school later this year
- Academies Week, the newspaper which reports on what's going on in schools, which changed its name to Schools Week
- Birmingham, recognised in the latest survey as the most entrepreneurial city outside London
- 'Cyber-attacks, ubiquitous drones, spooky smartphones and the continuing rise of wearable technology,' all leading predictions for 2015 in a survey of leading techies

- Magna Carta, along with the Battles of Agincourt and Waterloo, one of a number of significant historical anniversaries which fall this year but which the Schools Minister fears a lack of general knowledge will mean young people will fail to recognise the importance of

Tweet(s) of the week

- *'Death of the ebook? Kindle sales have disappeared says Waterstones.'* @Teachit
- *Tory MP Binley. We need to improve the productivity of universities. They've had too many high tables, had it easy too long.* @JMorganTHE

Acronym(s) of the Week

- NNCOs. National Networks for Collaborative Outreach, a bit like AimHigher and intended to help schools, colleges and others who are supporting those of all ages, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, considering applying to HE, announced this week
- IUG. The Independent Universities Group, a group of non-profit and for-profit HE providers who have got together to represent their interests more accurately

Quote(s) of the week

- *"So we will have a revolution in vocational education so that as many young people leave school to do apprenticeships as currently go to university."* Ed Miliband re-affirms Labour backing for apprenticeships
- *"As the election looms I am keener than anyone for education policy to be debated. But I am also desperate for a conversation that leaves behind the incendiary rhetoric of 'the Blob' and 'class war.'* Tristram Hunt looks for a new kind of debate
- *"Among all available approaches, the UK offers still the most scalable and sustainable approach to university finance."* Andreas Schleicher reviews international tuition fee regimes

Number(s) of the week

- 4m. The number of 'conversations' with voters Labour is intending to have in the next four months as it takes its election campaign out to the country
- 86. The number of pages in the Treasury dossier released by the Government challenging the costing of many of the Opposition's plans including those on expanding apprenticeships, UTCs and the number of qualified teachers in schools and colleges
- Over £1m. The amount of initial funding distributed under the Early Years Pupil Premium

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee witness session with Nick Boles on 16-19 apprenticeships and traineeships (Wednesday)
- Important UCAS application deadline date (Thursday)
- And beyond: Annual Bett Conference (21st – 24th Jan,) publication of 2014 'league tables and further announcement on apprenticeships (both due before the end of the month)