

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 3 October 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

The political waggons moved on to Birmingham this week where the Conservatives were in conference talking about their plans for the future. For education watchers, youth employment was one issue, raised by both David Cameron and George Osborne in their speeches where the medicine included a mix of benefit freezes and more apprenticeships. The theme is likely to be picked up by the Lib-Dems, who've already pledged to fight for ring-fenced funding for 16-19 year olds, when they assemble in Conference this weekend. Given Ed Miliband's 'goal' of revolutionising apprenticeships, it makes apprenticeships if not youth employment one of the core themes of this year's Conference season. Another is teachers, assiduously courted by Nicky Morgan in her speech, '*Nicky Morgan launches the charm offensive*' was how the TES tweeted it, and where Labour continues to push for a fully qualified and trained profession, "*a world-class teacher in every classroom,*" in Tristram Hunt's words. On this, the Lib-Dems are thought to favour a parental guarantee. And a third theme running emerging out of the Conference season is vocational education signalled as the "*third plank*" in Labour's education reforms, briefly mentioned as a skills supply issue by the Conservatives and where standards and qualifications are under close scrutiny by the regulator. And we thought education would not be a big issue this time round.

Top headlines this week

- 'Colleges must stop delivering irrelevant courses with poor careers advice.' (**Monday**)
- 'A level 'turbulence' may lead to more university entrance exams.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Nicky Morgan pledges to cut teachers' workload.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Young people lack workplace skills in survey.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Apprentice 'arms race' must embrace colleges.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- David Cameron who indicated that a future Conservative Government would fund 3m apprenticeships as part of a pledge to eradicate youth unemployment (the Coalition originally pledged to create 250,000 more apprenticeships over the lifetime of this Parliament)
- George Osborne who set out a further range of financial priorities in his Conference speech including a freeze on working age benefits for two years to pay for an increase in the number of apprenticeships
- Nicky Morgan who changed the tone on education reform by recognising the 'heroic' work of teachers in helping to implement such reforms
- The BIS Dept who invited bids to set up a new research centre for vocational education

- The OECD who published an interesting blog about the growing education stature of the BRICS (Brazil, Russian Federation, India, China, South Africa) nations. 42.7m more secondary pupils brought into secondary education over the last decade in India for example
- HEFCE who brought together for the first time a range of data on higher education provision, participation, employment and graduate mobility in England creating in effect a map of 'hot' and 'cold' spots of HE
- The British Chambers of Commerce who became the latest organisation to publish a report highlighting employer concerns about the skill levels of recruits
- UCAS who have published their latest university entry tariff due to start taking effect from 2017
- The Chief Executive of Ofqual who spoke this week about the procedures being undertaken to reform the qualification system and the timescale needed (potentially two years) if a new Government wished to re-couple the AS level
- The Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference of leading independent schools who called for a new quality charter for the exam system
- The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) who reported on some interesting research into what helps motivate pupils when it comes to GCSE success and found that it wasn't always the lure of a cash prize
- The think tank IPPR whose latest report makes the case for locally appointed schools commissioners at a city and county regional level responsible for standards and commissioning
- The NUT who called for a new national body to be responsible for curriculum and assessment development in their manifesto for education

Tweet of the week

- *"We need a period of stability on assessment. Exam boards are overwhelmed and examiners are underpaid."* @NUTonline

Quote of the week

- *"I have two priorities. First, to do everything I can to reduce the overall burden on teachers. Second, to ensure that teachers spend more time in the classroom, teaching."* The education Secretary on her two big priorities

Number of the week

- £14,450. The average technology budget in primary schools according to research from the British Educational Suppliers Association
- £64,400. The average technology budget in a typical secondary school according to the same research

What to look out for next week

- Lib-Dem Conference begins (Saturday)
- Vince Cable addresses Conference (Monday am)

- David Laws Q/A session (Tuesday)
- Nick Clegg's Leader's speech (1.00pm Wednesday)