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Pocket Watch – General Election wish lists

Introduction

So one year to go to the next general election and what is the world of education wishing for?

According to a recent poll quoted in the TES, 31% of school teachers said they weren't sure which Party had the best education policies while 28% thought none of them did. Not a great start perhaps but then the general view at present is that education won't be a defining issue in 2015 in the way that it has been in the elections of 2010, 1997 and 1987. That's partly because other factors like the economy, cost of living, Europe and immigration are generally grabbing the headlines but also partly because there's little excitement currently around public service reform. School reform often attracts popular interest and has become a lightning conductor for Michael Gove but even here few radical alternatives are emerging at present. As for FE and skills training, they rarely attract much attention while HE is grappling with its own demons many of which will run well into the post 2015 period.

As for what different parts of the education world are saying, funding inevitably appears as a theme in initial thoughts so far though from different perspectives but a strong runner at this early stage is for a period of calm to allow what has been yet another hectic period of change to settle in. *"A radical overhaul of the system is not needed"* is how the 157 Group, the Group representing the largest UK colleges put it in their earlier manifesto pitch. Whistling in the wind? Perhaps but the sentiment has at least been echoed by one Education Minister namely David Laws, who in his speech to the ATL Annual Conference last month argued, *"after the significant changes in curricula, qualifications and systems of accountability, there is a very strong rationale for a significant period of stability to allow these changes to bed in."*

Time will tell for as one commentator famously put it, we have a tradition of pulling things up to see if they are growing rather than allowing them to bed in. Further horticultural metaphors apart, here's a selection, one each from schools, FE and HE of what's being called for so far.

Schools. The Head teachers' Roundtable education manifesto

The Head teachers' Roundtable has become a prominent voice in recent years and brings together a group of head teachers and Principals to articulate the views of the sector.

Last week, as the countdown for the final year began, the group launched a ten point Education Election Manifesto embracing *'five key policy areas:'* the teaching profession, qualifications, accountability, system coherence and underachievement. Described in their words as *"a modest collection of coherent ideas,"* the manifesto's core message is for a fully qualified and supported profession with compulsory membership of the proposed College of Teaching. In addition, the current accountability measures should be left to bed in, Ofsted lesson inspections should be used for context only and not as a grading exercise, schools should have access to similar freedoms and on more traditional ground, a more coherent 14-19 qualification framework, a Bacc based *"holistic umbrella qualification for all learners with tiered outcomes at Advanced, Intermediate, Foundation and Entry level"* should be established.

Here are the ten recommendations in order.

1. Schools, in partnership with Initial Teacher Education providers, to deliver a 2-yr Induction programme for all entrants with a 5-yr pathway to a Professional Qualification with Masters Degree Equivalence
2. The College of Teaching to become the main body to represent the profession, independent of government, setting standards for teachers and with compulsory membership for all teachers
3. A National Bacc framework with associated careers guidance and learner transcript to be introduced

4. Exam boards to develop and trial a set of standalone 'slim volume' courses in post-16 English and maths and to become a requirement within five years
5. Tiered Ofsted inspections, proportionate to identified risk, to be introduced, graded lesson observation removed and an Ofsted trained head teacher to be in every inspection team
6. Current accountability proposals allowed to bed in, the EBacc measure to be removed and schools to publish an annual commentary on their performance on their website
7. Freedoms, including those on the curriculum, funding and grants, to be available across maintained schools and academies
8. Transition Standards Grants to encourage better transition between primary and secondary to be introduced
9. A national 0-5 Parent Support Strategy to help tackle the under-achievement needs of the very young to be developed
10. A National Recruitment Fund aimed at attracting talented head teachers, English and maths teachers into working in deprived areas, to be established

FE. Five key requests from the 157 Group

These came in the form of a Paper released earlier this year from the 157 Group of colleges.

Strategic in nature with an emphasis on trust, stability and responsiveness, the requests provide a set of principles to enable colleges to develop as leading skill providers. Politically at the moment, the drive seems to be towards the creation of more specialised providers, so quite how far such principles will apply long-term remains to be seen but they include:

1. A stable policy landscape, *"we believe the systems and infrastructure we now have in England to determine qualifications and review quality do not need fundamental change"*
2. A one quality system that measures the performance of all post-14 education and training providers in the same way. *"The aim should be to establish a performance management system led by governing bodies but externally inspected and verified"*
3. A more coherent approach to working with employers potentially through a new investment fund, rather like HE's Innovation Fund and created by bringing together a number of the current disparate funding streams and initiatives
4. A clearer and more acknowledged role for colleges as lead players in local communities
5. A shift away from constant funding changes towards more stable, long-term budgets within recognised efficiencies such as national value for money indicators

HE. Three themes from Universities UK

A number of the different HE groupings will be putting out their wish lists in the coming months but for the moment, we have some thoughts from Universities UK, a body that speaks for a large part of UKHE, who put out a blog also to mark the final year countdown.

The thrust was that despite all the recent alarms about the long-term sustainability of the student loan system, fee reform has allowed investment to come in, it's too early for obituaries and throwing it all up in the air too soon would be hugely damaging; *"we do not need the system to be uprooted in the short term and replaced with something new,"* although it did go on to say that long-term reform shouldn't be ruled out.

Overall UUK will be campaigning around three areas. First the creation of a broad political consensus on student funding, second an easing of restrictions on the recruitment of international students and third an increase in investment in research and innovation, up from a current 0.5% of GDP to an internationally benchmarked 0.8%.



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