

## Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



### Highlights of week ending Friday 1 May 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

So the last lap beckons and by this time next week we should know, or perhaps not if the polls are accurate, who has won the 2015 general election.

It's an opportune moment to consider how education now stands after four weeks of campaigning. Arguably four points stand out.

First, while education has not featured as a high-vis issue in the same way as the economy, health and welfare, it has been in there as an important topic. The Lib-Dems have made it the centrepiece of their campaign, have referenced it on 24 of their hefty 157 manifesto pages as well as dedicating a whole pull-out chapter to it and have made it a redline in any likely Coalition negotiations. The other two main Parties have given education plenty of coverage as well, with the Conservatives citing it on 11 out of 83 pages in their manifesto and Labour on 15 out of their 83 pages. In fact learners in some form, be they school pupils, apprentices or university students, get almost as much attention as a reference group as those famed 'hard-working families' of Britain.

Second, none of the three main Parties has been short of pledges when it comes to education. Few have been new and not many are wildly exciting particularly when you consider some of the other work going on within and around the profession for a new National Bacc, a new inspection approach, a new college system, even a new 25-year vision. The Conservatives have 38 pledges on their shopping list, Labour 37 and the Lib-Dems nearly double that at 63.

Third, in terms of balance, the manifestos, let alone the campaign itself have gone with form. So schools/teachers/curriculum have got most of the attention listed in 20 of the Conservative pledges, 19 of the Labour ones and a whopping 42 of the Lib-Dem with HE some way behind that and FE, as tends to happen, with the smallest amount.

Fourth, in terms of issues, funding has clearly featured prominently in manifestos and on politicians' lips with the Conservatives pledging to invest in more school places and apprenticeships and Labour and the Lib-Dems making much of their protection of the entire education budget to age 18 and in Labour's case, the reduction in tuition fees. For schools, teacher development and institutional performance feature heavily throughout all manifestos, for colleges apprenticeships, English and maths, careers and employability are writ large and for HE it's visas, vocationalism and value-for-money.

#### Top headlines this week

- 'Free school supporters press for parental rights.' (**Monday**)
- 'Tories to fund apprenticeships with bank fines.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'How have we got education so disastrously wrong?' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Outsource marking to cut teachers' workload.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Google should be allowed in exams.' (**Friday**)

## People/organisations in the news this week

- David Cameron who promised to use £220m+ of bank fines to pay for a further **50,000 apprenticeships** especially 20-24 year olds who have been out of work for six months as part of a five point guarantee for young people
- Nick Clegg who has made an increase in education spending a Lib-Dem **redline** in any future Coalition negotiations and pledged to support free school meals for all primary school children from 2017/18
- The Institute of Fiscal Studies who followed up their analysis of the major Party's spending plans by doing the **same** to their tax and benefits plans and ended up equally bemused
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) whose economic growth **report** for the first three months of the year revealed a sharper slowdown than anticipated
- The Complete University Guide whose latest **report** indicated that universities were now doing a lot more to improve facilities, reduce class sizes and develop undergrad employability skills
- Warwick, Dundee, Brunel, Plymouth and Portsmouth, the top five 'younger' universities to keep an eye on according to the editor of the Times HE Rankings
- The HE sector, 46% of whom intend to vote Labour, 22% Green, 11% Conservative and 9% Lib-Dem in a **poll** conducted by the Times Higher
- David Willetts who has been announced as the new Chair of the Resolution Foundation
- Cooking and baking, playing a musical instrument and learning a language, the top three skills people would love to learn according to a National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) **survey** published ahead of the Festival of Learning
- The 157 group who published a **report** calling for an incoming government to consider granting colleges greater freedoms and flexibilities to enable them to respond more effectively to learner and employer needs
- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) who have published their **survey** of the work-based learning workforce showing that 63% were female, 29% received a salary of less than £15,000, 25% were part-time and functional skills was the hardest subject to recruit for
- **Andy Westwood** and **Julian Gravatt** each of whom blogged about the current political obsession with apprenticeships and some of the implications
- The Edge Foundation who have taken over sponsorship of this year's Skills Show
- The Campaign for Science and Engineering who **looked at** the science and engineering policies of all three major Parties and found little to excite them
- Cambridge Assessment who published new **research** showing the extent of volatility in exam results and argued as a result that it would be better for school performance to be judged over a period of time rather than on the basis of a one-year snapshot
- The National Governors' Association who along with the NAHT, ASCL and the Local Government Association, have published updated **guidance** on the roles of governors and school leaders
- The NSPCC who have published a **guide** to help parents ensure their children are safe online

## Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Schools becoming A and E depts of communities, says union leader."* @LouisMMCoiffait

- *"Send children's homework abroad to be marked says leading academic."* @bbceducation
- *"There is no teacher workload crisis-just politics."* @JohnRentoul
- *"Education reform under my glorious reign? Find a better way of presenting/organising school work than worksheets stuck in exercise books."* @drlangtry\_girl
- *"Let's ban PowerPoint in lectures- it makes students more stupid and professors more boring."* @The Conversation
- *"Panel beaters and baristas don't have to learn Shakespeare or chemistry just to be good at learning says Prof John Hattie."* @tes
- *"Is my mum allowed in? Job interview nightmares revealed."* @reedcouk

### Acronym(s) of the Week

- QS World University Rankings. A global university ranking system that assesses over 3,000 HE institutions and ranks the world's top 800 by country, region, subject, reputation causing considerable flurry amongst universities particularly if they're near the top. Its latest rankings have just been published

### Quote(s) of the week

- *"If you're young, want to work hard and want to get on, the Conservative Party is for you."* David Cameron
- *"Everyone can-with efforts and persistence-learn the maths they need for everyday life and work."* National Numeracy's Mike Ellicock on doing the maths as Labour sets out plans for maths for all up to the age of 18
- *"Without investment in education, there can be no deal with Liberal Democrats."* Nick Clegg on where the Lib-Dems would draw the line in any future Coalition arrangements
- *"Apprenticeships have become a proxy for pretty much all vocational education and at the same time, cat nip for politicians."* Former Labour adviser Andy Westwood on the allure of apprenticeships
- *"You can expect some efficiency savings in certain areas but you can't keep trimming and trimming and expect core provision to remain."* A secondary school head teacher interviewed for the Guardian's education issues series
- *"The main reason (they struggle) is that delivering high-quality vocational education in England is nowhere near as easy as some UTC enthusiasts seemed to think."* The 157 Group Chief Executive Lynne Sedgemore on some of the challenges facing UTCs

### Number(s) of the week

- £227m. The amount of (Libor) bank fine money that David Cameron has promised will be used to help fund an increase in apprenticeship numbers
- £55.3bn. How much the Lib-Dems are promising to ensure is spent on education by 2020, up from the current £49.6bn
- £600m a year. The amount it would cost to extend free school meals to all primary school pupils under Lib-Dem plans
- 517,113. The number of pupils in UK independent schools according to latest official figures, up 1% on last year

**What to look out for next week**

- NAHT Annual Conference (today and over the weekend)
- Election results start to come in (late Thursday night)