

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 2 October 2015

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

The media crowded in enthusiastically but what have we really learned from this week's new look Labour Party Conference particularly for the world of education? According to some, the new leader looked like a teacher and even sounded like one particularly when he began his speech by asking: *"Any chance we could start?"* It's a phrase many teachers would recognise.

There was a big call for *'a kinder politics, a more caring society'* but when it came to education, there were just five lines. It's very early days of course but some pointers have begun to emerge both during and after the Conference.

At present three stand out. First, the pledge to scrap tuition fees, one of the big Corbyn campaign pledges but which has now been put on hold while it's subjected to the Party's extensive policy making process. It might emerge, it might not but as the Shadow HE Minister put it rather guardedly: *"there needs to be a deep process of thought."* Second Academies and Free Schools, the main focus of those five lines and where the new Shadow Education Secretary confirmed; *"no more Free Schools and academy chains will be made accountable."* And third, the economy and skills, where as part of an alternative economic plan proposed by the Shadow Chancellor, a new Economic Advisory Committee would be set up and a new, more powerful role as a driver of growth granted to BIS under a future Labour government.

Now it's off to Manchester where the Conservatives host the last of this season's major Party Conferences, (Business, skills and the economy on Monday, education on Tuesday, the Prime Minister's speech Wednesday.)

The mood will be different but there's no shortage of issues when it comes to an area like education.

To highlight just a few from the week's headlines below; first higher education where despite HEFCE's welcome report on the career progression of the Class of 2008/9, those in other words who graduated at the height of the financial crisis, deep concerns remain about future funding and the impact of the Spending Review (see Sir Paul Nurse's quote below.) Second, the area-review process for FE, blasted as a *"shambles"* by the Shadow Schools Minister and now drawn into the latest consultation on adult learning accountability measures launched this week. Third, the funding of skills training and in particular the apprenticeship levy for which consultation closed this week. To quote from the CBI's submission; *"a new levy won't be welcomed by business so we want to see a new politically independent Levy Board setting the rate."* And fourth and never far away, teacher recruitment where despite the announcement this week of new, increased bursaries, UCAS figures on recruitment to teacher training courses remains low in some key subjects.

Top headlines this week

'Compulsory academic GCSEs 'a problem for some,' says Ofsted chief.' (**Monday**)

'Campaign warns 11% of world illiterate.' (**Tuesday**)

'Jeremy Corbyn commits to making schools accountable to councils.' (**Wednesday**)

'Pupils chose YouTube over teachers for careers advice.' (**Thursday**)

'Experts fear race to bottom after Ofqual drops extra science GCSE checks.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who in a wide-ranging **speech** to the Labour Party Conference, signalled that the BIS Dept would be a key driver of economic growth in any future Labour government
- Lucy Powell who used her first Conference **speech** as Shadow Education Secretary to call for greater local accountability for academies and a halt to the creation of more Free Schools
- The Institute of Government who used a series of charts to provide an interesting **analysis** of the Labour frontbench
- Sheffield City Region which has become the latest region to sign up to the Chancellor's programme for devolving management of **local growth planning** and investment
- The BIS Dept who launched further **consultation** on the new outcome based success measures it intends to use for post-19 education and training from summer 2017
- The DfE who have responded to concerns about teacher recruitment by **announcing** increased bursaries for teachers of core subjects and increased funding for Schools Direct
- **Project Literacy**, a global alliance of business and charities, who have submitted a virtual petition to world leaders at the UN calling on them to prioritise the enormous issue of illiteracy around the world
- The **Hays Global Skills Index** whose latest report covering 31 countries highlighted continuing concerns about skill shortages in different parts of the world
- **Deloitte**, who have announced that from next year they will not look at which school or university a candidate attended so that they can be judged on merit
- HEFCE who **reported** on the career progression of UK students who had graduated at around the time of the economic crash in 2008/09 and found that nearly 78% were in professional jobs between 6 and 40 months after leaving uni
- The Consumer Ombudsman Services who published a useful student **guide** full of tips on how to deal with landlords, utility companies and service providers for students embarking on life away from home
- Judith Petts, currently pro vice-chancellor at Southampton University, who has been appointed as vice-chancellor at **Plymouth University** from Feb 2016
- The **RQF** (Regulated Qualifications Framework) which replaced the QCF from this week
- The consultation on the **apprenticeship levy** which closed today (Friday Oct 2) with employer groups expressing concerns about cost, quality and business impact
- Ofsted who **confirmed** that it would be publishing a survey report on apprenticeships this month and will also undertake a follow-up survey on 16-19 study programmes
- Ofqual Director Jeremy Benson who outlined some of the issues surrounding innovation and technology in assessment in a **speech** to the FELTAG Conference this week
- The LSE's Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion whose joint **report** on the performance of disadvantaged pupils in London added to the growing weight of evidence building up about the success of the capital's schools
- The DfE who updated its **guidance** on implementing the pay arrangements in schools
- The Prince's Teaching Institute which according to the **TES** is moving into primary education and running its first ever event for primary heads this week

- 'To Kill a Mockingbird,' 'The Book Thief,' 'The Lord of the Rings,' 'Pride and Prejudice,' 'The Catcher in the Rye,' the top five books (in order) in W.H. Smith's social media customer survey of the **top paperback books** of all time

Tweet(s) of the week

- "@GordonMarsden on tuition fees: we are going to review our position. We rule nothing in and nothing out." **@AaronPorter**
- "We have to get away from thinking policy problems are solved by setting a big number" **@IPPR_NickP #Lab15 #apprenticeships**
- "The apprenticeship levy is probably a game changer but we don't know what game we are playing says @davidhNIACE." **@FEWeek**
- "The great majority of Tweets on Twitter is education is education-based not b/c educators are in great numbers but the group is prolific." **@tomwhitby**
- "Online communities are the new staffrooms says #UKFEchat founder @MrsSarahSimons" **@tesfenews**
- "Have we redesigned our entire curriculum simply because one man read a book? The DfE's obsession with E.D.Hirsch." **@SecEd_Education**

Quote(s) of the week

- "We'll also turn the Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills into a powerful economic development dept in charge of public investment, infrastructure planning and setting new standards in the labour market." The Shadow Chancellor promises a more expansive role for BIS under a Labour government
- "I don't intend to sit on the sidelines. We will make a difference." The new Shadow Education Secretary appears keen to make her mark
- "Neanderthals." Sir Paul Nurse's view of anyone attempting to cut the science budget (Sir Paul is currently leading a major review of research councils)
- "There is a feeling that beyond the narrowest of employment-related targets, politicians no longer care about what becomes of FE." The **Policy Consortium** checks the pulse of FE six months on from its annual survey of the sector
- "I know nothing about education." But the new chief executive of the 157 group of Colleges is learning very fast according to an interview in the TES
- "We're proud of what we've done with free schools meals." The PM's spokesman dismisses speculation that free school meals could be cut as part of the Spending Review
- "When you're up at 1.00am planning lessons, it's less lonely if you watch Bargain Hunt." One of the lessons learnt by new primary school teachers according to the **TES**

Number(s) of the week

- 757m. The number of people across the world classified as illiterate and whose needs have been highlighted in a new global **campaign** launched at the UN
- 34. The number of UK universities in the top 200 of the Times Higher annual world university **rankings** published this week

- 55. The number of current world leaders who have been educated at UK universities and thus added to UKHE's international standing according to research from the **HE Policy Institute**
- £240 a year. How much students living away from home typically lose out because they don't know their **rights** or how to complain
- 57p. The increase in the apprentice hourly rate of the **National Minimum Wage** implemented this week bringing the hourly total now to £3.30 (£6.50 an hour for adult workers)
- 62% of qualified teachers are female yet only 36% of heads are female; the teaching glass ceiling reported on in **The Guardian** this week

What to look out for next week

- Conservative Party Conference (Sunday-Wednesday)
- National Customer Service Week (all week)