

## Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



### Highlights of week ending Friday 23 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

It's been annual BETT Conference week so there's been a lot of interest in IT and all things digital. One survey published on the eve of the Conference even suggested that IT was the most important school subject for kids nowadays while Steven Schwartz, one time V.C. at Brunel University took to a blog to argue that new technology could be the saviour of HE *'transforming it from a craft industry in which academics produce bespoke courses to a modern industry which combines the best course materials with online delivery.'*

New technology continues to ask questions of politicians and educators alike. This week for instance we have seen the full range of views with the global **Gates Foundation** highlighting the importance of tablets and smartphones in spreading learning opportunities in developing countries and closer to home, the general secretary of the **head teachers association** calling for some of the money being spent on new-fangled equipment to be given over to training up good teachers *"and sticking them in front of old-fashioned blackboards."* It was left to the Education Secretary in her speech to BETT to highlight three areas where she felt technology could play a major role in the future: in making performance data more sophisticated, in transforming assessment techniques and in reducing teacher workloads. We shall see.

On the election front this week, Nick Clegg announced a pledge to eliminate child illiteracy by 2025, Tristram Hunt vowed to make reform of vocational education his 'personal mission,' the Labour Party continued to muse over university tuition fees, the government proposed new powers for Scotland and the Greens continued their upward surge. It was left to the OECD to put things in perspective with a report challenging governments to spend less time coming up with new education initiatives and more on checking out what works and why or more often, why not.

#### Top headlines this week

- 'No child illiteracy by 2025, Nick Clegg pledges.' (**Monday**)
- 'Most education reforms not given chance to work.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Pupil progress key for primary accountability.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Tech companies link up with schools to boost computer lessons.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Changing the channel on the skills gap.' (**Friday**)

#### People/organisations in the news this week

- President Obama who made cheaper, and in some cases free, higher education a core part of his 2015 State of the Union address
- The government who is committing £3.6m match funding to support five new projects that will see major companies and top universities work together to help train computer teachers

- The Education Secretary who used her speech to the world Education Forum to ram home her new year message of support for teachers and how they transform lives
- Nick Clegg who not only pledged to commit to ending child illiteracy by 2025 but also claimed to lead the only political Party dedicated to protecting education funding
- Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt who argued in a speech to the BETT Conference that *'tired old snobberies'* were holding back the development of technical education in Britain
- The BIS Dept who published the latest Growth Dashboard on progress being made against current skills, productivity and other economic targets
- The DfE who updated the statutory guidance for local authorities on managing schools causing concern
- The OECD whose latest report on different education systems found that only one in ten of the 450 different reforms attempted across various countries had been properly evaluated
- The Public Accounts Committee which continued to take the government to task over its failure to stress test initiatives for 16-19 year olds in its latest report on the matter
- UK unemployment which fell overall to 1.9m in the latest figures covering the three months up to Nov 2014 but which saw a worrying but small increase of that for 16-24 yr olds
- Aldershot, Brighton, Edinburgh, Cambridge and Reading, the top five areas with the most qualified residents according to the latest report from the Centre for Cities think tank
- Nick Hillman, director of the HE Policy Institute, who responded to media stories that the Labour Party was considering charging a lower tuition fee for STEM and other in-demand degrees by posing six challenging questions that the proposal raises
- X-Factor's Dermot O'Leary, an ex-sixth form college student himself, who lent his voice to a campaign to have the contentious VAT charge removed from Sixth Form Colleges
- Inspectors who are meeting together in the first ever international conference hosted by Ofsted and international inspectorates to consider quality issues in FE vocational learning
- Head teachers for whom an updated set of professional standards was published built around four domains: qualities and knowledge; pupils and staff; systems and processes; system self-improvement
- Sir Andrew Carter whose report into Initial Teacher Training (ITT) recommended the creation of an independent body to help determine a future ITT framework
- Academy schools who were accused of stockpiling funds in bank accounts
- Ofqual who outlined the three strands of its GCSE maths research programme due to report by the end of this April and focusing on the comparison of item demand and question difficulty
- IT which was rated the most important school subject today by over two-thirds of people questioned in a recent survey (maths came 2<sup>nd</sup>, English 3<sup>rd</sup> and languages 4<sup>th</sup>)
- Alternative schooling, the subject of the latest BBC fly on the wall documentaries which started on BBC 3 this week
- Primary school accountability, the subject of a well-publicised report by the think tank CentreForum backed by Pearson which argues for pupil progress to be the key measure
- KS2 tests where the DfE published the statutory guidance for the operation of this year's tests
- 'Motivated,' the most over-used word currently appearing on the LinkedIn site as people brush up their cv's for a new job at the start of a new year. (The next three were 'creative,' 'enthusiastic' and 'passionate')

### Tweet(s) of the week

- *'The new frontline of parenting is the argument over children's computer time.'* @seanjcoughlan
- *'HE is the strongest, sturdiest ladder to increased social mobility.'* @universitiesuk
- *'Schools should stop wasting money buying ipads for kids and spend the money on teachers.'* @ed\_ontap

### Acronym(s) of the Week

- ONS. The Office for National Statistics who among other things publish the Blue Book which records and reports on UK economic activity in the UK and is used in reports such as the government's Growth Dashboard cited above
- ETAG. Education Technology Action Group who published their first major report this week with 19 recommendations intended to enhance learning and assessment development

### Quote(s) of the week

- *"My job is to help where I can and get out of the way when I should."* The Education Secretary describes how she sees her job
- *"Let's call homework what it really is. It's a parent test. I hope the biggest dog in the world comes out and eats it."* Times Columnist Caitlin Moran has little time for homework
- *"There is a simple, if radical, solution to apprenticeship funding. Employers could be told that any eligible apprentice can receive up to a maximum off-the-job training free at a college or approved training provider. After that it's up to them."* Lynne Sedgemore, Executive Director of the 157 Group, proposes a solution to the apprenticeship funding conundrum

### Number(s) of the week

- 8.8 seconds. The average time an employer spends scanning an applicant's c.v.
- 58m. The number of primary-age children around the world still not in education according to the latest report from UNESCO
- £335,000. How much the average Sixth Form College pays in VAT a year
- 84%. The number of UK bosses worried about skill levels according to the latest PWC CEO survey (up a staggering 20% on last year)

### What to look out for next week

- Public Accounts Committee witness session on DfE and EFA accounts (Monday)
- All Party Parliamentary Group session on Sixth Form Colleges (Monday)
- Publication of KSS4/5 destination data (Tuesday)
- Centre for Market Reform Of Education lecture by Julian Le Grand on school choice (Tues)
- Education Committee witness session with Ofsted Chief Inspector (Wednesday)