

## Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



### Highlights of week ending Friday 6 March 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

We're moving into the last few weeks of this current Parliament. At the end of this month, March 30 to be precise, Parliament will be dissolved and the so-called purdah, when the hatches come down on new business and initiatives, will begin.

It's not quite all over yet of course, there's still a lot of business to be completed and some tidying up to be done. Next week for instance sees the latest National Apprenticeship Week where given the current policy interest in apprenticeships we're likely to see Ministers from all Parties out in force across the country lending their support. Key days are likely to be the Monday when any policy directions or signals will be made, Wednesday when the theme is traineeships and young people and Thursday when higher apprenticeships are in the spotlight. The Deputy Prime Minister has already issued a video message heralding the launch of the week of activities which will also include a number of conferences, events and publication launches up and down the country.

And then the week after that we move on to one of the final set piece occasions of this Parliament in the form of Budget 2015 when the Chancellor will look to ensure that the economic mood is positive as the electioneering begins in earnest.

For education, funding inevitably remains one of the major causes of concern and many people will be waiting for the Spending Review that will follow the election later this year with varying degrees of trepidation accordingly. It's hard to convey all the concerns in simple terms but for the moment this is how they are shaping up.

For schools, the issue is what to ring fence and at what cost, should it be for ages 5-16 or should it be from early years through to age 18? And if the latter is it the overall budget or per-pupil funding that should be protected? The Conservatives have gone for flat cash per-pupil aged 5-16, Labour and the Lib-Dems for protected budget funding from cradle to college. You pays your money, perhaps. For FE, the issue is the gradual erosion of government grants and the shift towards business and individual investment where the question for all Parties, yet to be fully answered though local commissioning is seen as part of it, is how to build a modern skills policy on an evolving business model. And for HE where the reverberations from Labour's recent HE tuition fees announcement are still being felt, the issue is how to get the balance right between state and student investment while protecting the most disadvantaged and ensuring a strong presence in the global market. Another Commission on HE funding? Some think so.

#### Top headlines this week

- 'Give girls careers advice before age of 10 says Shadow Education Secretary.' (**Monday**)
- 'All schools need trained careers advisers, says charity.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Audit Office to examine financial sustainability of FE sector.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Exam changes risk problems for schools, say heads.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Tories consider plan to pay off teachers' student debt.' (**Friday**)

## People/organisations in the news this week

- The Conservatives who are said to be considering further announcements about HE funding and progression pathways
- Schools, colleges and universities all facing new responsibilities under the latest Counter Terrorism and Security Act which became law a couple of weeks ago
- The BIS Dept who published a brief case study report on the impact of reformed governance in colleges
- The University Alliance who called for a new HE Regulation Bill as part of its response to HEFCE's quality assurance review
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs,) the subject of a new report by the think tank Localis calling for LEPs to be given greater powers and funding including over all adult skills training
- The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission who published a report calling on any incoming government to take action in five priority areas including education
- The YMCA who called on all Parties to prioritise jobless young people in their latest manifesto
- The Manufacturer's Organisation EEF who launched a new skills manifesto calling an increase in the numbers of manufacturing apprentice and graduates and better training in schools
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation who suggested six other ways that Labour's higher education 'money' might be better used such as supporting careers guidance and/or skills training
- The Association of Colleges (AoC) who questioned what would happen under Labour's new HE fees policy to those colleges already charging less than the £9000 maximum
- The National Audit Office who will announced a review into the financial sustainability of colleges and how this is managed by government and its agencies
- The think tank Demos who published the final report from its year-long inquiry into Construction and other apprenticeships calling for more to be done to incentivise apprenticeships in schools, for a quality charter mark for programmes and for clarity on funding schemes
- UCL's Institute of Education who researched English and maths performance post-16 and found the attainment gap worsening rather than improving
- NIACE who looked in to how to get 16-24 year olds interested in carrying on with English and maths and found that it helps when it's fun, interactive and helps get a job
- Ofqual who announced its sticking with proposed changes to practical assessment in GCSE science despite concern including those from the Secretary of State
- Teach First who called on all schools to appoint a middle manager to lead on careers guidance as it launched its own new careers programme for its recruits
- Ofsted who published a report on how some secondary schools are supporting their most able pupils and concluded that a lot more 'stretch and challenge' was needed
- Secondary schools where places for this Sept were allocated this week with the primary 'bulge' on places starting to be felt

- Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister who was on hand to support this year's World Book Day and announced that the government is going to put funding in to help more primary schools set up book clubs
- Education Datalab, a new research group specialising in the use of large datasets to help inform and improve education policy making

### Tweet(s) of the week

- *"We should not have all STEM and no flower."* @Director\_IOE
- *"That's it. Last education questions before the election. All done. It wasn't a classic."* @Schools Week
- *"The election should be a time for parties to set out how they'll tackle poverty but so far they've failed, says Alan Milburn."* @mrsjacksoncooks
- *"Publishers should club together to start a Real Maths Day, one that is not just a huge marketing exercise. Any takers?"* @timstirrup (in response to this week's World Book Day)
- *"Perhaps October babies derive from après-ski while June babies follow a wet weekend in Blackpool."* @OldDitch (in response to the this week's Committee Inquiry into the education attainment of summer babies)

### Acronym(s) of the Week

- NMITE. The New Model in Technology and Engineering, the UK's first new purpose built university for 30 years opening in Hereford in two years time
- CEIAG. Careers education, information, advice and guidance

### Quote(s) of the week

- *"We have consulted widely and have identified a new approach to the assessment of practical science that will liberate teachers to offer a wider variety of classroom experimentation and promote effective student progression to further study or employment."* Ofqual announces changes for GCSE science practicals
- *"In this environment, planning becomes a guessing game."* A Guardian blogger reflects on Labour's tuition fees announcement

### Number(s) of the week

- 8. The minimum number of practical activities pupils must complete for the new GCSE single science
- 4 out of 5. The number of 16-18 year olds who care about politics according to a survey by YouGov and Speakers for Schools

### What to look out for next week

- National Apprenticeship Week (all week with a focus on policy on Monday, traineeships on Wed and higher apprenticeships on Thursday)
- Education Committee publish their report into 16-19 apprenticeships and traineeships (Monday)

- The think tank Policy Exchange publish a report into Free Schools (Monday)
- Westminster debate on school funding (Tuesday)
- Inaugural lecture by for the FE Trust for Leadership by Dr James Krantz (Tuesday)
- TES Global pre-election debate with each of the 3 Education Secretaries (Wednesday)
- Demos launch of the final report from its Apprenticeship commission (Thursday)