

Policy Eye: Election 2015



Highlights of week ending Friday 26 September 2014

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a new 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 in a word

The first of the major Party Conferences got under way this week with the Labour Party in Manchester laying out its general election stall. The Conference waggons have now moved on to Birmingham where the Conservatives are setting up camp but the week has been dominated by reflections and analysis of where Labour now stands eight months away from the 2015 general election. Much of the time was spent looking to the future so Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt highlighted three future priorities, Ed Miliband followed up with six while Ed Balls went two better with eight. Big picture apart and views are mixed on how far the Party addressed these, when it comes to education, Labour has hoisted three clear flags: early years; teacher quality; and a high-quality vocational route. A lot of the detail has still to be worked out, Liam Byrne for instance acknowledged that the Party's position on university tuition fees may not be finalised until the turn of the year if then, but two issues seem to be emerging which even when the Conference noise is stilled seem likely to run through to the election. One is spending, or more precisely the continued need for spending cuts of some form which is bringing a degree of caution to policy announcements. Ed Balls for instance talked about how his Party's current Zero-Based Review was, in his words, "examining every pound spent by government to cut out waste and make different choices." The Conservatives are likely to ram home the dangers of giving the keys to the other lot as the Chancellor puts it but all Parties are being kept on their financial toes by bodies such as the Centre for Policy Studies and the Institute for Fiscal Studies both of whom this week have been scrutinising various spending plans. And the other issue is just how far there is an appetite for the kind of sweeping change we've seen for schools and qualifications in recent years. Interestingly in Manchester, Ed Miliband went for a 10-year vision while Chuka Umanna opted for a 2030 agenda. Reform for the better is one thing; constant, short-term upheaval is another.

Top headlines this week

- 'Universities still recruiting students a month after A levels.' (**Monday**)
- 'One in five primary schools could fail over tougher targets.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Teachers losing confidence in exam marking, study suggests.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Low-level classroom disruption hits learning, Ofsted warns.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Clegg hits out at apprenticeship snobbery.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Ed Miliband whose six election pledges announced at the Labour Party Conference included promises on low pay, Green Technology and apprenticeship recruitment

- Ed Balls who confirmed his Party's promise to introduce a job guarantee for young people if Labour wins the next general election
- Tristram Hunt who identified his three priorities for education as: childcare reform; a world-class teacher in every classroom; and a transformed vocational skills system
- The BIS Dept who reported on the impact of the latest apprenticeship reforms on equality issues
- BIS and SFA who published the latest range of data on success rates and participation in the FE sector
- Ofsted whose latest report suggested anything up to an hour's learning a day is wasted because of poor pupil behaviour
- Ofqual whose latest user survey found continuing high levels of support for A levels, lower levels of support for GCSE but constant change to exams the big bugbear for many
- UCAS who highlighted the growing number of students entering university this year with vocational qualifications such as BTECs
- Uni graduates whose job prospects, according to the latest report from the HE Careers Service, are better than they've been for 15 years
- The Skills Commission whose preliminary report into the skills system highlighted a number of concerns about its lack of responsiveness to market needs
- The DfE and Ofqual who launched a consultation on the proposed content and assessment requirements for new GCSEs in D/T, Drama, Citizenship Studies and Cooking and Nutrition and A/AS Drama and Theatre
- Key Stage 1 pupils, more of whom this year have met the expected standard in phonics according to the latest Statistical Release from the DfE
- The think tank Policy Exchange who called for a further wave of academy development as one of a number of recommendations in a major report on primary education

Tweet of the week

- *"I cringe a little when politicians talk about driving up standards. No one wants to lower them."* @NUTonline

Quote of the week

- *"Schools succeed-like England and Scotland-better together."* The Shadow Education Secretary shows his support for Labour's keyword of the week-togetherness

Number of the week

- 499,730. The current number of students set to start UK HE courses this autumn according to the latest figures from UCAS
- 38. The number of days a year that Ofsted reckon some pupils miss out on learning due to some form of disruptive behaviour

What to look out for next week

- Conservative Party Conference begins (Sunday)
- The Chancellor addresses the Conference (Monday morning)
- The Secretary of State for Education addresses the Conference (Tuesday afternoon)
- The Prime Minister addresses the Conference (Wednesday morning)
- DfE publish a report on Academy income and expenditure 2012-13 (Thursday)