

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 24 April 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

According to a YouGov poll this week, education is one of two topics that voters believe is not being discussed enough in the current election campaign; the environment is the other.

Education did start the election from a fairly low base as seventh out of ten most popular voter issues but rose for a while to fourth and clearly remains an important concern for many, so what's going on, why the scant attention? One reason is that politicians have been fixated by the top three issues of health, wealth and welfare, let alone the more recent issue of the SNP, even if as the poll shows, voters are becoming increasingly tired by the heavy focus on Scotland in particular. Another reason, as Aditya Chakraborty highlighted in a widely trended piece in The Guardian this week, is that politicians have become increasingly distant from people's real concerns "*democratic leaders have parted ways with their voters,*" he argued. A third reason is that there is no dramatic new political vision for education heaving into sight as there was with Michael Gove in 2010 and Tony Blair in 1997; little therefore to get your teeth into.

But there is a fourth, perhaps more significant reason, and that as the survey by The Key and Ipsos Mori indicates and can be seen in Friday's headline below, is that actually there's little in the manifestos or in what politicians are saying either to get excited about or that gets to the root of current problems. Politicians may talk about school brands, performance management and college responsiveness but the real issues as the latest survey shows are about constant change, teacher workload, funding and the quality of teaching.

In fairness, there have been a number of education developments this week with Nicky Morgan pledging to protect minority languages, Tristram Hunt highlighting further possible 14-19 reform and Nick Clegg hinting at Lib-Dem interest in heading up any future education dept but whether these are the sorts of announcements to galvanise debate on education, we'll have to wait until two weeks to know.

Top headlines this week

- 'Trainee teachers deterred by complexities.' (**Monday**)
- 'Clegg demands control of education in any coalition.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Question and Answer session with Nicky Morgan.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Labour could replace GCSEs with baccs to end stigma.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Head teachers unhappy with all Parties' education policies.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Nicky Morgan who pledged that a future Conservative government would protect GCSEs and A levels in minority subjects

- Tristram Hunt who indicated that a future Labour government may well look at replacing GCSEs with a single Bacc award at some point over the next decade
- The Labour Party who pulled together pledges on the minimum wage, tuition fees and internships into a manifesto pledge for young people
- The Lib-Dems who re-iterated their education manifesto pledges in the form of a 'Five Point Plan' for teachers and parents and published a new strategy for the creative industries
- The FT who wrote a piece about how overseas demand was fuelling a boom in London universities
- The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) who have created a so-called 'Wall of Shame' of current disingenuous HE election pledges and issues
- Alex Salmond who has been awarded an honorary degree from Glasgow university
- Nolan Smith who has been promoted to director of Finance at HEFCE from 1 May 2015
- Megan Dunn who has been elected to succeed Toni Pearce as president of the National Union of Students
- The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) who set out a list of ten policies for an incoming government to help improve adult learning provision
- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) who officially launched its new website of resources and guidance to help providers adopt the new Prevent requirements
- Ken Robinson, the influential educational polemicist, whose latest book on developing creative schools was praised by Tristram Hunt and others in an article in The Guardian
- The SSAT who reported on the work of its Vision 2040 group which is attempting to set out a new vision for education for over the next 25 years
- The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) who published a route map and 10-point plan to help improve teacher recruitment
- Geoff Smith, vice-chairman of the UK Maths Trust, who argued that it was counter-productive for high-fliers in maths to take their GCSEs and A level early and that they would be better served by being stretched in their current work than fast tracked
- The Conversation who examined the issue of choice and provision of primary school places
- NFER who listed five questions schools might want to ask when choosing a baseline assessment scheme

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Revision: just go to the movies, teachers say."* @SchoolsImprove
- *"We don't need digital detox but there is a need to rethink our relationship with technology."* @JISC
- *"J.Hattie suggests every school should have an expert in interpreting data and evidence."* @tes
- *"There's now a moratorium on the 'Shakespeare bard from pub' joke. Anymore and you'll be bard from participating."* @tes

Acronym(s) of the Week

- Prevent. A duty, set out in the recent Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which requires education providers to help *'prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'*

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Britain needs skills, skills, skills or else we're stuffed."* Labour's Tristram Hunt on the importance of skills
- *"It's a big, hairy conversation that you have to begin early."* Tristram Hunt on reforming the 14-19 curriculum
- *"What we need is a period of calm and stability to help the changes of recent years to bed in and spread throughout the system."* Nicky Morgan on avoiding too much chopping and changing
- *"If you are a teacher, be assured the Liberal Democrats will get politics out of the classroom and give you the freedom you need to teach your pupils."* Nick Clegg re-assures teachers
- *"Unfortunately the electorate is at best armed with only an incomplete picture of what they can expect from any of these four Parties."* The Institute of Fiscal Studies assesses the spending plans of four of the main parties but is left scratching its head

Number(s) of the week

- 0.3%. The amount of time given over to discussing HE in the current election campaign according to research from Loughborough University
- 64.3%. The success rate for 16-18 year olds in Functional Skills according to research identified by FE Week
- 1,000. The number of extra training places for nurses Labour is proposing from this Sept
- 600,000. The additional number of free childcare places the Conservatives are proposing
- 8.7. The number of hours a week of homework that a 15 year old Italian 15 year old typically faces according to research, the highest amongst EU countries. England comes in 15th on the chart, apparently with 4.9 hours a week per pupil
- 6½. The number of hours a day young people spend on social media and gaming consoles according to recent research

What to look out for next week

- Last full week of electioneering