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ISC POLITICAL SUMMARY

Wednesday 24th February -
Tuesday 2nd March 2010

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2. Institute for Fiscal Studies: Pupil Premium
3. The Lamb Enquiry: Government response
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Michael Gove MP on 'the language of nature'

Tuesday 2nd March

Mr. Gove was at the Royal Society on Tuesday, addressing the position of mathematics and science in the curriculum, and promising to wrestle control of A-levels from bureaucrats and hand it, in the interests of rigour, to universities, learned societies and examination boards.

Mr. Gove talked about the 'quid pro quo' of giving more control to universities, and asked them in future to be more honest about which qualifications they consider to best serve students making choices about higher education. Addressing the current uneven playing field in IGCSEs, he also made clear that state schools would be able to offer the qualification, and that every child would be entitled to study 'triple science' - biology, chemistry and physics as discrete qualifications.

Moving then to teachers, Mr. Gove said having greater flexibility over pay and conditions was key to attracting specialist teachers, further incentivising mathematics & science graduates in particular by promising to pay off their student loans while they remained in the teaching profession.

It was very much in the spirit of Mr. Gove's address that he raised many questions, and admitted that he didn't yet know the answer to some of them. What is clear, however, is that Mr. Gove was seeking to address some of the genuine concern in the scientific community about the lack of rigour in some existing qualifications, and, with the promise of an opportunity to get involved with the process in future, it will surely have been very well-received by such a keen society.

What remains to be seen is how far a Conservative government would allow other parties to influence the direction of the curriculum and the content of qualifications, should they win the election. The scientific disciplines can relax, to some extent, with Tuesday's announcement. Industry and the trade unions play an important role for vocational qualifications in the Swedish system Mr. Gove is keen to emulate in Britain - it is not beyond the realm of possibility that they be allowed to follow in a similar vein, especially as the value of vocational qualifications is linked to a greater extent to the ease with which they facilitate jobs.

A full copy of Mr. Gove's speech is available from the Conservative Party website:

http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/03/We_will_end_the_political_control_of_A_levels.aspx

Institute for Fiscal Studies: Pupil Premium & New Schools

Tuesday 2nd March

With *The Pupil Premium: Assessing the Options*, the IFS presents a wide-ranging and well-referenced look at the different options available to those seeking to provide extra funds to schools for disadvantaged pupils, and what effect that may have on the propagation of new schools.

Grouping the options into whether they either: build on the existing funding system; replace specific parts of it, or; start again from scratch, the pros and cons of each are examined. The report places no undue emphasis on the wide number of factors influencing educational disadvantage, suggesting in conclusion that a geo-demographic system such as MOSAIC (which incorporates socio-cultural factors, and has been previously recommended by [Policy Exchange](#)) would be a better way of targeting the premium than the current Government's measure, Free School Meal entitlement.

Ultimately, the report suggests 'any revenue-neutral or low-net-cost option is likely to lead to significant numbers of schools experiencing large losses in per-pupil funding' and that implementing such a premium in a period of restraint would be difficult. The report finds it hard to see that potential gains outweigh potential losses.

You can download the report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies:

<http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/comm113.pdf>

Government Response to the Lamb Enquiry

Wednesday 24th February

Ed Balls gave a statement to the House on Wednesday indicating that the Government would take forward each of the 51 recommendations in the [Lamb Enquiry](#) into parental confidence in the SEN assessment. *Improving parental confidence in the special educational needs system* details (in Annex A, p. 38) what the Government will be working towards, and over what timescales.

Mr. Balls has also given Mr. Lamb some extra time to assess Government progress against this implementation plan, and so his next report will be published in the summer, rather than in April (as originally planned).

A transcript of Mr. Balls' statement is available in Hansard:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100224/wmstext/100224m0001.htm#10022461000015>

Improving parental confidence in the special educational needs system: An implementation plan is available to download (in PDF format) from the DCSF's website:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/lambinquiry/downloads/8623-DCSF-ParentalConfidence.pdf>

Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval

Monday 1st March

In its recently-published first (biennial) review of qualifications for 14- to 19-year-olds, JACQA has recommended that funding be withdrawn from qualifications that have zero or low enrolments. Of the almost 6,500 qualifications available, two thirds are taken by fewer than 100 people per year.

The Government did not confirm which qualifications would lose their funding and be scrapped, but did confirm its intent to focus on Diplomas, GCES & A-Levels, Apprenticeships, and Foundation Learning.

The biennial review is available to download from the DCSF's website:

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/BiennialReviewReport_%20010310.pdf

and; the Government's response:

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/documents/JACQAbiennialReview_response.pdf

The Week Ahead

Wednesday 3rd March

09:30, Wilson Room, Portcullis House

Children, Schools and Families Select Committee
Learning Outside the Classroom [Oral evidence session]

With evidence from: Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, Countryside Alliance, Field Studies Council, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sir Mike Tomlinson; Association of School and College Leaders, Association of Teachers and Lecturers, National Association of Head Teachers, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, and National Union of Teachers

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14:00 - 19:00, The Commonwealth Club, London

CentreForum and the New Schools Network
School Reform: from policy to practice [One-day conference]

With speakers: Michael Gove MP; David Laws MP; Baroness Morgan of Huyton; Anders Hultin, co-founder, Kunskapsskolan; James Merriman, CEO, the New York City Charter School Centre; Lucy Heller, Managing Director, ARK Schools UK; Luke Sibieta, Institute for Fiscal Studies; Julian McCrae, Institute for Government; Prof. Alison Wolf, King's College, London

Thursday 4th March

Time TBC, Main Chamber, House of Lords
Teaching excellence in schools [Debate]

Baroness Morgan of Drefelin & Baroness Shephard of Northwold

Monday 8th March

Time TBC, Main Chamber, House of Lords
Children, Schools and Families Bill [Second reading]

Speakers¹: Lords Bates, Laming, Layard, Lucas and Ramsbotham, and; Baronesses Deech, Morgan of Drefelin, Verna, Walmsley and Warnock

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14:30, Main Chamber, House of Commons
Children, Schools and Families [Oral questions]

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¹ The speakers listed when this Summary was written (02/03/10). The most up-to-date list at any point is available from the Government Whips Office.

17:15, Room TBC, Portcullis House

CSF Select Committee

From Baker to Balls: the foundations of the education system [Oral evidence session]

With evidence from: The Lord Baker of Dorking; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Charles Clarke MP, and David Blunkett MP

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