

Policy Eye: Election 2015



Highlights of week ending Friday 12 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

MPs have only been back for a week and already they are off again preparing for the Scottish referendum and the annual Party Conference season. They will be back in early October. For the world of education, it's back with a vengeance and facing a mass of announcements and reports this week. Ofqual's latest positional statement on the GCSE grading scale has topped the education news this morning and attracted considerable comment. The NAHT called it "*sensible*" and an accompanying Paper summarising responses to the earlier consultation indicates broad support for many of the features. Most comment at present is concentrated on two grades: grade 5 and its potential status as an international benchmarking level and the top grade, grade 9 and how that will apply. The new scale will be applied in the first instance to the new English and maths programmes being introduced next year. Elsewhere it's been a difficult week for those two backbone subjects; English and maths, highlighted in a number of reports and given a tough ride particularly by Ofsted in its review of 16-19 programmes. For those who want the bigger picture, it doesn't come much bigger than the OECD's annual data fest of how different education systems are performing, in this case across 44 countries. The Guardian's headline about the UK having more graduates but not necessarily more skills or social mobility and listed below for Wednesday probably summarises the 500+ pages best. And talking of graduates, the Daily Telegraph helps those packing up for university for the first time with a profile of the 12 types of student you'll meet in freshers week. All is revealed [here](#).

Top headlines this week

- 'Poor reading could cost UK £32bn in growth by 2025.' (**Monday**)
- 'Urgent help needed for adults with poor skills, say MPs.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'UK has more graduates but without skills and social mobility to match.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Ofsted warns over provision for school leavers.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Top grades to be given to just 3% in English and maths.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The HE Minister who in his first speech to an HE audience this week ruled out further cuts for HE as well as any rise in tuition fees
- The DfE's Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary research (EPPSE) project which confirmed that pre-school education can help pupils secure good grades and jobs in the future
- The Libs-Dems who pledged to include ring fenced funding from cradle to college in their 2015 General Election Manifesto

- The Office for Budget Responsibility who warned that further cuts to spending on public services remain likely
- The BIS Committee who called for a better co-ordinated campaign to tackle adult literacy and numeracy on the same day that a new 'Read on: Get on' campaign was launched to encourage more young people to read
- The OECD whose latest annual 'Education at a Glance' data buster about the performance of education systems in different countries raised continuing concerns about the plight of low-skilled young people
- Ofqual who announced further details on how the new 1-9 grading scale at GCSE for the first year will operate
- Ofsted whose survey of 16-19 study programmes one year on, made 20 recommendations to help improve provision and support especially for lower level programmes
- The Northern Ireland Education Minister who confirmed they will continue to include practical science assessments in science A levels
- Foreign language teachers who will be supported by a new network of 'teaching hubs' announced by the DfE
- The National Careers Council which published another critical report on the current state of careers guidance particularly that for school age students
- The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) which launched the findings of its year-long Great Education Debate as a forerunner for its new blueprint for a self-improving school system due to be published just before the 2015 election
- The Sutton Trust which launched a 10-point 'social mobility through education' Manifesto
- Wellington College which launched a leading research centre in the school system for the first time
- New primary school teachers who were advised to ignore perceived wisdom in a blog on the Guardian's Teacher Network and to make sure they did smile before Christmas
- School governors who were faced with the 3rd update this year on their roles and responsibilities in a new 119 page handbook
- St Andrews which emerged as the cheapest place to study amongst top universities
- Teachers who emerge as third in a list of coffee drinkers after journalists and police officers, consuming on average more than four cups a day

Tweet of the week

- *"Teaching is the most important job in the country: test scores explain 80% of GDP growth over 40 yrs."* @samfr (quoting from a lecture this week by the celebrated US educationist, Doug Lemov)

Quote of the week

- *"We do need to caution against direct comparisons and overly simplistic descriptions of the approach."* Ofqual on the new grading structure for GCSE

Number of the week

- 1.5m. The number of 11 yr olds who according to a new campaign being led by leading charities, businesses and teachers, will be unable to read in the next 10 years unless action is taken now
- 6.5% and 7%. The percentage of 16-18 learners who managed to raise their GCSE English and maths grades to a C over the last two years

What to look out for next week

- NIACE workshop on the future of National Occupational Standards (Tuesday)
- DfE consultation on proposed subject content for 2016 GCSEs/A levels closes (Friday)