

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 8 January 2016

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

Back to work for most this week and with it the traditional potpourri of forecasts, predictions and wish-lists for the coming 12 months.

The Prime Minister did his best to lighten the mood with an upbeat New Year message: *"the prospects are good. We go into this year with low inflation, rising employment and growth."* The Chancellor in turn rather dampened it a week later with a keynote speech warning that we aren't out of the economic woods yet: *"last year was the worst for global growth since the crash and this year opens with a dangerous cocktail of threats."* Echoing a phrase used recently by the new Director-General at the CBI, the Chancellor warned of 'creeping complacency' when it comes to the economy; it makes Budget Day on March 16 look doubly important.

As for education, a number of people have had their say on what they think lies ahead.

For schools, the Headteacher and prominent blogger **Geoff Barton** summed up the mood for many by calling for 2016 to be *'the year of great teaching.'* *"A key part of our role in the coming year I'd suggest is maintaining the confidence to do what matters most in our schools...and not to let ourselves be distracted by anything that isn't going to help a teacher teach better or a student learn more effectively."*

For FE, Will Martin on the **TES FE website** listed nine challenges facing the sector in the coming year with area reviews, the apprenticeship levy, skills devolution and the position of Sixth-Form Colleges prominent among them. For HE, the **Times Higher** invited a number of practitioners and pundits to offer their predictions with perhaps inevitably how to measure teaching excellence, Brexit, research and the implications of the Green Paper high on the list here.

All in all therefore it looks like being yet another busy year and an accompanying Policy Watch has attempted to list some of the specifics lying in wait over the next few months. These include for schools a keynote speech by Sir Michael Wilshaw on January 18, the publication of performance tables on January 21 and closure of the consultation on implementing the EBacc on January 29. Schools will no doubt be hoping that the consultation on a new fair funding formula won't be far behind. For FE, area reviews and apprenticeships make the running with Wave 2 of the former and a new comms strategy for the latter both due to begin this month. For HE, consultation on the Green Paper closes next week and further consultation on the metrics for a Teaching Excellence Framework is due to follow at some point later. Feels like a long year already.

Top headlines this week

- 'Times tables to be tested by age 11.' (**Monday**)
- 'Competition launched to find FE's stars of social media.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Gender gap in UK degree subjects doubles in 8 years, UCAS study finds.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Delay urged for tuition fees revamp.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Summer exams will not be fitted around Ramadan, confirm boards.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister whose **New Year message** listed four areas of social reform that he wanted to see tackled this year (home ownership; poverty; social mobility; extremism)
- The government who is hoping to launch a new 'Notify' **text alert service** to provide members of the public with important update information about areas of public service delivery including education
- BIS who updated its listing for the final 3 waves of the **post-16 area-based reviews** due to take place later this year
- The Education Secretary who confirmed that trials will begin this summer of onscreen **times tables** testing of 11 year olds with a view to full roll-out next year
- Nicola Sturgeon who announced a more extensive testing regime for primary pupils, a new £100m Attainment Fund, a mandatory qualification for head teachers and greater collaboration between schools as part of a **National Improvement Framework for Scotland**
- UCAS who published a further batch of data on **2015 higher ed admissions** pointing to significant gender imbalances in the take-up of some subjects
- The Higher Ed Policy Institute (HEPI) who published its **response to the HE Green Paper** in the form of a collection essays by leading experts highlighting in many cases lessons to be learnt from past reforms
- The House of Commons Library who published a useful Briefing Paper on **apprenticeship statistics** by constituencies in England
- Sir David Carter who has been confirmed as the new **National Schools Commissioner**
- The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) who responded to some media confusion about the timetabling of this year's exams by issuing a **clarification statement** (see under link and quotes below)
- Education Committee chairs who have chivvied the government up about the **status of PSHE**
- The House of Commons Library who published a helpful overview of the current **GCSE/AS/A level reform programme**
- The OECD's Andreas Schleicher who in an interview with the TES, marked the start of the build-up to the latest **PISA test rankings** later this year by highlighting the importance of the new problem-solving test
- Action for Children who expressed concern about how much time children spent in front of TV and computer screens and who published **five 'top tips'** to help parents pull the plug including 'turning your own device off when spending time with children'
- St Bede Academy in Bolton which has become the first school in the country to open its own **childminding agency**

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"In 2030 most universities will be run by boring white men in grey suits. Maybe I'll be one of them."* @johncanning
- *"It's that evening before a new term. Everyone-veterans to new recruits- is likely to be feeling the same butterflies. Always the same."* @RealGeoffBarton
- *"All the single colleges now put your hands up. @matt_hamnett on mergers, college reform."* @ stephenexley

Quote(s) of the week

- *"I genuinely believe we are in the middle of one of the great reforming decades in our history-what I would call a turnaround decade, where we can use the platform of our renewed economic strength to go for real social renewal."* The Prime Minister in bullish mood in his New Year message
- *"Anyone who thinks it's mission accomplished with the British economy is making a grave mistake."* The Chancellor of the Exchequer in less bullish mood in his first keynote speech of the year
- *"Has the women's movement become so normalised that we cannot conceive of needing to take positive action to secure equal education outcomes for boys?"* The Chief Exec of UCAS raises concerns about a lack of male participation in HE
- *"It is important to note that the (exam) timetable for 2016 was drafted over a year ago, is published and won't be changing."* The Joint Council sets the record straight on the timetabling of this year's exams
- *"They will help teachers recognise those at risk of falling behind and allow us to target those areas where children aren't being given a fair shot to succeed."* The Education Secretary makes the case for the new times tables tests to be introduced for 11 yr olds
- *"The government is tripping over itself to introduce new tests."* The NAHT general secretary on the government's proposed new times tables tests for 11 yr olds
- *"As the Scripture tells us: Where there is no vision, the people perish."* Geoff Barton reflects on a new year for education
- *"It takes three months to change a habit."* The government's mental health czar encourages schools to use the school term to start a mental health revolution

Number(s) of the week

- 12 x 12. What 11 yr olds will need to know the answer to as part of the times tables tests being piloted this year
- £250,000. The amount the College of Teaching is looking to raise by February 25 to help with the setting up of the College (It's on £19,000+ so far)
- 112 out of 180. The number of subject areas at the start of the current university year in which women outnumbered men (men outnumbered women in just 65 subject areas)
- €1,500 a year. How much universities in Finland will charge international students from next year as it becomes the latest country to start charging university tuition fees

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee witness session on mental health and well-being of looked after children (Wednesday)
- APPG on FE and Lifelong Learning (Wednesday)
- Consultation closes on the HE Green Paper (Friday)
- Jeremy Corbyn due to speak at the Fabian New Year Conference (Saturday)