Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 10 May 2019

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a 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.

A long awaited report, some keynote speeches, measuring well-being in higher ed, 'a steep decline' in computing education in schools, and a global perspective on skills for 2019; all make the education news this week.

Let's start with that long awaited report first. This was the Timpson report into school exclusions, first signalled in late 2017, launched under former Education Minister Edward Timpson in March 2018, expected to report at the end of last year but eventually making it to the line at the start of this week. Part of the reason for the delay has been the emergence of other related issues such as off-rolling and gang crime but part also has been internal debate about what powers over exclusions head teachers should actually have.

In the end, the report leaves this and a number of issues open for further debate and consultation but does come up with 30 proposals. Chief among these include making schools responsible for the educational outcomes of the students they exclude where the details are left for consultation, reducing the period of fixed-term exclusions, also left for consultation, and strengthening alternative provision and the role of local authorities. The government called it 'a landmark report' but for many people two bits are missing: some money and some changes to the accountability system. Both are likely to be debated for some time.

Next those keynote speeches, one from the Education Secretary at the end of last week and the other from the Universities and Science Minister on Tuesday. In the former, Damian Hinds told head teachers that he heard them 'loud and clear' on funding but wanted more help with making the case for special needs. He also continued to chip away at the burden of accountability by announcing a simpler 'requires improvement' metric for schools that need support. In the other speech, Chris Skidmore, in the first of a series of speeches on R/D outlined what's needed in terms of investment and future talent; both important ingredients for the after Brexit era.

Third, what's going on with computing in schools in England? According to Roehampton University's latest report, the number of hours given over to computing/ICT has dropped 47% at Key Stage 4 (KS4) over recent years, students are taking fewer computing qualifications and in some schools, no computing qualification at all was offered at KS4. Hence the headlines of 'steep decline' leaving concerns about how far some students in some areas are missing out. Stats will be closely scrutinised this summer.

Finally, the OECD's latest big report on future skills focusing on the impact of digitalisation where some countries, notably Scandinavia and the Netherlands, are forging ahead. The central message from this report is the need for a broad skillset and lifelong learning, to be able to take advantage of the benefits.

Top headlines this week

- 'Hundreds of students in UK sanctioned over racist or offensive online posts.' (Monday)
- 'Excluded pupils' results to be part of league tables.' (Tuesday)
- 'Computing in schools in steep decline.' (Wednesday)
- 'UK teachers most tech-savvy in developed world.' (Thursday)
- 'Schools cut breaks to cram in more lessons.' (Friday)

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- International migration and education. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported on the impact of international migration on state funded primary and secondary schools in England showing best available data on the numbers of teachers and pupils born outside the UK in schools as well as performance in English as an additional language where attainment gaps tended to close by age 16

- Training at Work. In another report, the ONS published analysis of trends and participation in training at work in the UK using the latest 2017 data, confirming previous intelligence that those higher up the tree tend to get more opportunities to undertake training, with professional, caring, leisure and service occupations having the highest participation rates

HE

- Investing in R/D. Universities and Science Minister, Chris Skidmore, made the first of what's intended to be a series of speeches on the long-term importance of UK investment in R/D and how we can best attract and support research talent in the future

- Measuring well-being in HE. The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) examined the issue of well-being in higher ed, calling for better understanding of its relationship with mental health and the collation of clearer data and information on both staff and students

- Post-Brexit fees. The Times Higher followed up rumours of EU students being charged like other international students after Brexit by suggesting that this could cost some universities at least 1% of income while others with less of a drop in numbers could maximize income

- Unconditional interference. The Guardian reported on the issue of unconditional offers with suggestions from a number of universities that the government's recent attempts to intervene could be seen as not just a challenge to university autonomy but to the spirit of the recent HE Act itself

- Customer satisfaction. The Times Higher reported on a new tool being developed by colleagues at the QAA and the LSE, that will collate online intelligence from students and others about an institution to allow it to understand and respond rapidly to potential issues

FE/Skills

- OECD Skills Outlook 2019. The OECD published its latest detailed report into the implications of digitalization for the workforce and the workplace where the need for supportive policies particularly

around lifelong, and the development of a broad skillset, cognitive as well as socio-emotional, appear paramount

- **Ten principles.** David Hughes, chief exec of the Association of Colleges, listed ten principles, including the need for progression and maintaining a choice of options, that should help shape discussions around the Level 3 and below qualifications review

Schools

- **School exclusions**. The government finally released the Timpson review into school exclusions and related issues with proposals for improving alternative provision and teacher support, revising the length of fixed-term exclusions and most prominently of all, for schools to be held responsible for the educational outcomes of pupils they exclude

- **Feeling excluded.** The Children's Commissioner for England published new research on what it's like to be excluded from school, based in this case on witness evidence from children and young people themselves, many of whom were suffering from a range of problems

- **Off-rolling survey**. Ofsted released the results of a YouGov survey of teachers into the issue of removing pupils off register known as off-rolling, indicating that nearly a quarter working in schools in England had seen this happen, often around exam time, and were concerned about the practice and its impact on young people and families

- **No bad behaviour here.** The government announced a new 3-year programme to support schools in need of help in dealing with poor pupil behaviour by creating a network of advisers and lead schools to develop and share best practice

- **Child protection**. The Education Secretary launched a new programme, following a series of high-level Ministerial summits, intended to provide greater all-round agency support for children at risk of criminal or other exploitation

- **Requires improvement.** The Education Secretary confirmed in a speech to the head teachers' conference late last week that the government was simplifying the system for identifying schools in need of support, by scrapping measures such as 'floor' and 'coasting' standards from this September and using Ofsted's 'requires improvement' as the only measure

- **Sticking with the framework.** Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector, also addressed the head teachers' conference last weekend where she defended the changes to the inspection framework which had provoked disagreement among some head teachers and highlighted other issues such as school exclusions that Ofsted was concerned about

- **GCSE factsheets**. The government published the latest version of its GCSE factsheets, aimed at parents, providers and employers, and updated to include this year's batch of GCSEs beig graded on the 9 - 1 scale

- **Annual Computing Education Report**. Roehampton University issued an early warning from its annual report on computing in schools showing a drop in taught time and in the numbers of students taking a computing GCSE exam

- **Reimagining Education**. The Innovation Unit and charity Big Change published survey results showing that many teachers and parents are keen to see schools able to do more than prepare children for exams, highlighting 20 case studies across the world where schools are doing just this

- Summertime support. The government announced its was increasing the amount of funding and support going in to provide disadvantaged children with free meals and activities over the this year's summer hols

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "I think it's part of the constitutional settlement of the UK that every ed reform has to propose this (transform school accountability,) and then not do it" - @xtophercook
- "These are the five character traits that have been determined most important at @Eton_College: respect, gratitude, perseverance, motivation, happiness. #BSAConf2019" -@tes
- "Interesting and perhaps surprising stat from @nickhillman: 4 in 5 students think it's okay for universities to contact their parents if extreme mental health concerns arise" -@StevenJones_MCR
- "Opinion: University pressure is now so bad that students are turning to memes for mental health support" -@Independent
- "Sheep registered as pupils in French school to stop classes from closing" -@Independent

Other stories of the week

- Multi-tasking. One of the features that came out of the recent round of teacher union conferences, particularly that for head teachers, was just how much they're being asked to do as part of the job. Many people may think that well, teaching and being in the classroom is what being a teacher is all about but increasingly they're having to help clean tables, sort out shelving, even occasionally clean up sick. In an interesting article, the BBC education team listed seven unlikely jobs head teachers are being asked to do. A link to the article is here

Quote(s) of the week

- "Exclusion from school should never mean exclusion from education" – former Education Minister Edward Timpson introduces his new report on school exclusions
- "Too many teachers manage despite, rather than because of, the behaviour in their classrooms" – behaviour 'expert' Tom Bennett who will head up the government's new project on bad behaviour
- "Usually I just eat lunch in a room by myself, because I'm not allowed to eat in the big room with everyone else, I have to eat in a room by myself" – the Children's Commissioner hears what it's like from children who have been excluded from mainstream school
- "It's simple, it's well understood and it works for parents" – Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector, tells head teachers why Ofsted is sticking with the current inspection grading scale
- "They can be important but they shouldn't be overwhelming" – Esther Rantzen, President of Childline, on exams as more young people are reported to be calling Childline worried about exams
- "Being assessed is always a stressful situation" – the Chair of Ofqual on exam anxiety

Number(s) of the week

- 260,000. How many more researchers the UK is going to need by 2027 if it is to meet its ambitions on scale, according to the Universities and Science Minister

- 2.6%. The number of UK workers needing training to avoid a high risk of automation compared to an OECD average of 2.8%, according to a new Skills report from the OECD

- £7m pa. How much some English universities might lose if EU students are charged a similar rate as other international students post-Brexit, according to analysis from the Times Higher

- 104. How many students in UK universities have been sanctioned for posting offensive online posts over the last year, according to an FoI reported on by the Education Guardian

- 78%. How many pupils excluded from mainstream schools in recent years either have special needs or qualify for free school meals, according to the Timpson report on school exclusions

- 48. How many minutes were given over to teaching computing per KS3 students in 2017, down from just over an hour in 2012, according to new research from Roehampton University

- 19%. The number of pupils in state funded schools in England at the start of last year who had English as an additional language, according to a new report by the Office for National statistics (ONS)

- £65m. The amount of unused free school meal allowances paid back to meal providers rather than retained in the system, according to a new campaign on the matter by Citizens UK

- 65 minutes. How much appears to have been cut off secondary school break times in schools in England over the last couple of decades, according to research from UCL

What to look out for next week

- SATs Week (Monday – Thursday)
- Love Our Colleges Week (Monday – Friday)
- Launch of Education Policy Institute Pearson commissioned report on 16-19 Funding (Monday)
- Learning at Work Week (Monday – Sunday)
- Going Global Conference (Monday – Wednesday)
- National Numeracy Day (Wednesday)
- Wonkhe's 'Building political trust and confidence in universities' event (Thursday)
- Skills and Education Group Annual Conference (Thursday)

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