

2015/21

4 Sept 2015

Pocket Watch – Autumn Scheduling

Introduction

With the government passing its first 100 days last month, seemingly intent on keeping up the pace, it looks like we're heading for another busy autumn.

Here's a few things to look out for over the coming months for the world of education.

Government 'stuff'

The main event here will come on November 25th when the Chancellor announces the outcomes of the 2015 Spending Review. Launched earlier this summer, the Review will determine dept budgets and spending priorities for a large chunk of this Parliament and so has the potential to be a defining moment. Individuals have been invited over the summer to submit their thoughts on where the review's projected £20bn of savings should come from (the closing date is actually today) while individual Depts will no doubt continue their wrangling throughout the next few months. At the last major such review in 2010, the BIS Dept went close to the wire before its budget details were settled and given some of the dire predictions that have been circulating this time, similar brinkmanship may be required again. Some decisions such as that on converting HE maintenance grants to loans from 2016 have already been taken while the Chancellor's announcement in his Summer Budget that he was allowing a further year to move into surplus has taken some of the heat out of things. The Review should include some specifics such as an update on the future funding formula for schools, the apprenticeship levy for FE and the recent review of Business-University research in HE but if we weren't already convinced, it will remind us that *'turning round the economy'* remains the government's top priority.

On the legislative front, three education-related Bills have already started their journey through Parliament with the Education Bill and its proposals about 'coasting' schools attracting the most comment. The other two up and running Bills are about to swap places, the Cities and Local Devolution Bill to the Commons and the Childcare Bill to the Lords. Three more Bills, on Enterprise, on Employment and Welfare, and on Immigration are due to be introduced shortly. Each will be worth watching. The Enterprise Bill will enshrine any new definition of apprenticeships, the Employment and Welfare Bill will endorse the government's new earn and learn arrangements for young people while the Immigration Bill will include clauses on skilled worker visa arrangements and requisite levels of English for certain public facing jobs.

Elsewhere a number of Select Committees have important Inquiries lined up for this autumn. The Education Committee, who have both Nicky Morgan and Sir Michael Wilshaw up before it this month, will be looking into the role of Regional Schools Commissioners and Ofsted while the BIS Committee will be examining the government's Productivity Plan. Two other Committee Inquiries worth noting include the Lords Social Mobility Committee which is investigating the transition into work for young people and where the call for evidence closes on 14 Sept. It's due to consider evidence over the autumn before issuing a report next March. The other one is the Home Affairs Committee which will be looking into the Tier 2 Skilled Workers System for which a visa cap was introduced three years ago and where there are concerns about the impact on recruitment in many sectors. This Committee is calling for evidence submissions by 9 Sept.

Finally, the government will be keeping a close eye on a number of structural reforms as the year progresses. These include the further academisation of the schools system, the area-based reviews for FE and the lifting of the numbers cap in HE.

School specific

For schools, this autumn sees the first of three years of implementing new GCSEs, AS and A' levels. This year's batch includes the three big GCSEs, two English and one maths, and some 13 AS and A' levels. At the same time, preparation work for the next two batches continues with

consultation on the design and assessment of the 2017 'batch' due to complete on 24 September. Also in September, the new Year 7 will start on their journey leading to the EBacc suite of GCSEs by 2018, initial trials of the National Reference Test are scheduled and the government report on Assessment without Levels is due for publication. The Rochford Review on assessment arrangements for pupils with low attainment incidentally reports in December.

Moving on, in mid-October, the government will for the first time publish provisional GCSE and other qualification performance data from this year's exams including also for the first time provisional Attainment 8 data for schools that opted in early for this. Final performance tables will be published as normal in January with the aim of helping parents as they make secondary school choices although as some head teachers are planning to publish a rival set of performance tables at around the same time, it may all get a bit messy.

Other things schools may be looking out for this autumn include the new Ofsted inspection regime which begins this month, the three new teacher workload groups, (on marking, on planning and resources and on data management,) proposed recently by the Education Secretary, and further developments around the College for Teaching and the Teacher Professional Development and Behaviour Management Expert Groups.

For FE

Autumn is an important time for the FE sector where the annual Colleges Conference and Skills Show in November often provide a focal point for announcements and developments.

FE providers will be awaiting the Spending Review announcements in November with more trepidation than most given recent announcements although their first task is to submit, by the end of this month, their updated financial plans following the latest cuts announced in July. The other big challenge facing the sector is its potential reshaping in the wake of the area-based reviews. These are due to get under way this month and continue through to March 2017 and form part of the shift towards greater local determinism. Government involvement in these reviews will be "*proportionate to the level of risk*" but most people believe the opportunity will also be used to review financial, quality and other issues of post-16 provision.

Three other things for FE to look out for this autumn include further development work around apprenticeships with a new Delivery Board and target in place and two consultations, one on status now complete and the other on the Levy, completing next month. Second, the reform programme around Functional Skills along with the new post QCF qualification framework due to be in place from 1 October. And third, further consultation on outcome based success measures along with more destination and earnings data both due in the coming weeks.

For HE

For HE where the ramifications of the lifting of the cap on student numbers this year will no doubt be scrutinised for much of the autumn four issues stand out. First, quality assurance where a Green Paper on a Teaching Excellence Framework is promised and where consultation on HEFCE's proposals on quality assurance closes on 18 Sept. Second, funding where institutions will be advised of their revised teaching grants in October, consultation on freezing the loan repayment threshold closes on 14 October and consultation on allowing some tuition fees to increase in line with inflation may follow. Third, further activity around validation arrangements, with the government likely to consider options for opening out the degree market to other 'best' providers. And fourth, visa issues where an Immigration Bill and Home Affairs Committee Inquiry are looming and a Migration Advisory Committee Report is due before the year end.



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