

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 10 July 2015

(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 and currently keeping a special 'eye' on developments following the 2015 election.)

The week summed up

One image sums up this week and it was that of the Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith punching his fists in the air, 'like an ageing disco dancer' according to one newspaper, as the Chancellor announced the creation of a new national living wage in his Budget speech.

The announcement was one of a number of carefully crafted measures that the Chancellor deftly pulled out of his bag, or according to the Opposition their bag, as he sought to seize ownership of the political agenda for the foreseeable future. Not everyone of course will have been punching the air with delight at the Chancellor's announcements and with the Budget setting out just £17bn of the projected £37bn of cuts needed over the lifetime of this Parliament, there may be more difficult moments to come but this is the picture so far with the Spending Review to come.

For education, three things stand out.

First, unlike previous Budgets there was little for schools to chew on. There was a nod to the current plan to deal with 'coasting' schools, some money for school cadet forces and reference to the trialling of the new JCP Employment/Careers adviser in the Midlands but that was about it. Capital funding for the new school system, 500 more Free Schools, new UTCs and so on, let alone a new national funding formula will have to await the Spending Review. Second, the 3m apprenticeship target is alive and kicking. The Chancellor confirmed this by announcing a new Youth Obligation from 2017 for 19-21 yr olds on Universal Credit who after six months will be put on training and apprenticeship programmes, and by taking the employer investment bull by the horns and announcing a levy on large UK employers to help fund apprenticeship growth. Details to come in the autumn Spending Review but Alison Wolf will be pleased. And third, HE where along with the expected announcement about converting maintenance loans into grants, the importance of high teaching quality was made clear. Not only will new providers who can demonstrate high standards be encouraged to enter the market but existing ones "offering high quality teaching will be allowed to increase their tuition fees in line with inflation from 2017" following consultation.

There's a lot more in the Budget of course and useful analysis of the whole thing can be found on the Institute of Fiscal Studies website [here](#) while the think tank IPPR have looked at the possible impact of future Dept cuts [here](#). The full-on Budget itself can be found [here](#).

Top headlines this week

- 'Exam focus damaging pupils' mental health, says NUT.' (**Monday**)
- 'Let retirees tackle growing teacher shortage, education minister says.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Over emphasis on exams results risks distorting learning, board warns.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Budget2015: maintenance grants for poorer students to be scrapped.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Osborne unveils new planning rules (under productivity Plan.)' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Chancellor who included some important measures on skills training, higher education and social welfare in his latest Budget outlined this week
- BIS Secretary Sajid Javid who **launched** the government's **Productivity Plan** which included specific references to the importance of professional and technical training and skills as a way of skilling up the future workforce (Plan just launched and 5 of the 16 chapters cover education and skills)
- Schools Minister Nick Gibb who used a keynote **speech** to the Education Reform Summit to spell out the core purposes of education that were driving the government's current reforms
- Shadow Education Secretary Tristram Hunt who continued his campaign for 14-19 reform by calling for a National Bacc with a 'life in the UK' test for all school leavers
- The newly created House of Lords **Committee on Social Mobility** which is looking at transition to work opportunities and guidance for young people and which held its first witness session this week
- Roger King, Visiting Professor in the School of Management at Bath University, who in an **article** in The Conversation expressed support for ranking universities by the quality of their teaching
- Roger Brown, former head of the QAA's predecessor the HE Quality Council, who wrote a **piece** in the Times Higher questioning some of the proposals in the latest review of HE quality assessment
- The Professionals in International Education (**PIE**) Network who published a survey of student views which found that most considered the ranking of a university important to future employment prospects
- The Higher Education Academy who published a **report** arguing that the growing number of students who enter higher education with a vocational qualification such as a BTEC should receive better support and preparation to help achieve the level of degree they deserve
- HEFCE who launched a call for evidence on computer science to inform the **review** currently being undertaken by Sir Nigel Shadbolt
- UCAS who published its latest **stats** for university entry 2015 covering the period up to the end of June and showing a 2% overall increase in entries on 2014
- The Skills Commission who offered a 60+ page **guide** to the workings of the skills system with six key proposals (around funding, quality, employer engagement, political consensus, systems thinking and stability) for reform
- Fiona Millar who invited all four Labour leadership candidates to offer their **thoughts** on education with some nominal results
- Curriculum expert Dr Peter Hill who has been appointed as education director at Nord Anglia
- The Greater Manchester strategy which in a **report** one-year on was found to be making good progress in a number of its priorities but where a lot of work is still to be done on tackling unemployment and skills
- NIACE who along with a number of leading employers has launched a new website called '**What Employers Want,**' aimed at providing young people aged 16-25 with advice, guidance and support as they seek to make the transition to work
- The NUT who published a commissioned **report** into the impact of a high-stakes exam and accountability system on schools in England suggesting that it was having a deleterious effect on young people

- Sir Michael Wilshaw who **wrote** to all schools in England to explain about the changes to inspection arrangements due to come in from this Sept
- The future of assessment, the subject of a **collection of essays** by education experts hosted and published as part of a conference by exam board AQA
- The think tank Demos who launched their **Integration Hub** showing the changing social and ethnic pattern of Britain and which indicated that in many areas schools remain highly segregated
- The BBC who confirmed plans to give away its new **Micro:bit computers** to 11 and 12 years this autumn and who will be setting up a not-for-profit company to help with the commercial distribution of them subsequently
- Tessa Jowell who **lamented** the failure to encourage more young people to take up sports which had been promised as part of the Olympic legacy and Lord Moynihan who tabled an amendment to the Charities Bill requiring independent schools to share their grounds

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Baroness Sharp: We have remarkably few people in Parliament who know anything about FE and skills."* @stephenexley
- *"BBC has agreed a budget reduction with Treasury timed for 2018. Colleges still waiting for news on more SFA cuts starting Aug 2015."* @JulianGravatt
- *"Minister seem to have great problems in seeing matters sometimes from the point of view of a school, says Kevin Brennan MP."* @SchoolsWeek
- *"Andreas Schleicher of OECD: student's mindset is one of the best predictors of learning outcomes anywhere in the world."* @tes
- *"As we approach SATs results, I keep asking myself: 'should 11 year olds be this worried?'"* @tes
- *"This year's must-have desk accessory: I survived another meeting that should have been an email."* @Independent

Acronym(s) of the Week

- WMCA. West Midlands Combined Authority, the latest region to declare for economic powerhouse status

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Johnson (like HEFCE) shows a rather touching faith in a modernised, external examining system for universities."* Professor Roger King questions the faith being placed on the external examiner system in HE
- *"The skills system is best conceptualised as an ecosystem made up of varied yet interdependent components adapting their behaviours to an ever changing environment."* The Skills Commission sets out to explain the skills system in Britain
- *"It does not have to be like this. There are much better ways to construct school accountability. Countries such as Finland, Canada and Scotland do it very differently."* NUT Gen Sec Christine Blower introducing her union's report on Exam Factories
- *"We are all giving a lot of thought to how we try to explain it to people."* The chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference on the current A level reforms

- *"I think he'd be very good but I'm not going to pass judgement on his classroom abilities until he's been through all the training."* The Education Secretary on the news that a retired partner in a law firm was considering becoming a teacher
- *"It would be a bit like saying that the Indian Minister for railways has got to know what is happening on the 8:57 into Calcutta."* Labour leadership hopeful Jeremy Corbyn on the problems of trying to run an education system from Whitehall

Number(s) of the week

- 2.4%. The Budget forecast figure for growth this year
- 1% per year. What the Chancellor allocated in his Budget for public sector pay rises, including those of teachers, for each of the next four years
- 25. The age at which the new National living Wage for workers will apply
- 121. The number of university professors who added their names to a letter to The Guardian calling on the Select Committee to examine the increasing government micro-management of the sector which they claim is leading to more compliance and less creativity
- 59m. The number of primary school-age children around the world missing out on a primary education according to a recent report from UNESCO

What to look out for next week

- Launch of Pearson/CBI Education and Skills Survey (Tuesday)
- Education Bill in Committee (Tues/Thurs)
- World Youth Skills Day (Wednesday)
- UCL/IoE STEM Education Centre ½ day interactive event (Wednesday)
- Nick Clegg gives evidence to the Lords Committee on Social Mobility for young people (Wed)
- Launch of Pearson/HEPI Paper on L4/5 skills (Thursday)