

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 11 Sept 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 as they year progresses.)

The week summed up

A major keynote speech, an interesting announcement and two important reports make up the bevy of education headlines this week.

The keynote speech which had many in the sector buzzing, not all contentedly, was from the HE Minister Jo Johnson at the Universities UK Annual Conference this week. In essence, this was the first real attempt to reflect some of the changes that have been taking place in HE since the 2011 White Paper and to reset the vision accordingly. As the Director of Wonkhe put it in his helpful **summary**, the speech reflects a shift from students being at the heart of the system, as per the title of the White Paper, to teaching being a core issue. Not that students don't remain central of course, after all they pay the bills but the new climate means they deserve better choices, better access and yes, better quality teaching. These and other matters such as making it easier for providers to gain degree-awarding powers and for new providers to enter the market, will be the subject of the much touted Green Paper due sometime this autumn. Bets are on as to when this might be; seasons can be very changeable these days.

The interesting announcement came from Schools Minister Nick Gibb when he confirmed in a letter that the Dept was considering changing the rules on when summer born children should start school. Basically it's going to offer more flexibility and consult accordingly before amending the Admissions Code. Whether summer born children as the youngest in a Year Group do actually struggle when they start school has been the source of contention for some time so this may be a sensible option although interestingly the Institute for Fiscal Studies published a report a couple of years ago arguing that the age at which they took tests rather than starting school was what really counted.

The two important reports this week concerned colleges and schools respectively.

Colleges, both Sixth Form and FE, are facing difficult times at present with a Damascene funding knife constantly hanging over them. To add to their uncertainties the government is proposing a series of area-wide reviews which will cover all colleges, attempt to weed out inefficient provision, and in official speak: *"establish an appropriate set of institutions to offer high quality provision."* A trail run of reviews in two parts of the country has led to considerable re-structuring and this week, BIS issued further guidance and gave the green light for further roll-out of the review process.

As for schools, this week Ofsted published the results of its survey of provision at key stage 3. The title of the report was 'KS3: the wasted years?' By the end, the question mark was not necessary.

Top headlines this week

- 'Decisions to scrap levels won't help pupils, say heads in major survey.' (**Monday**)
- 'Fears over unfair university admissions as AS levels disappear.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Start school a year late if you are born in summer.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Key Stage 3 pupils too low a priority, chief inspector of schools says.' (**Thursday**)
- 'England's schools face recruitment crisis.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Chancellor who confirmed that an **Autumn (financial) Statement** would be issued alongside the Spending Review announcements on 25 November
- The BIS Dept who announced that colleges in Greater Manchester and Sheffield would be the next to face area reviews as it launched its latest **guidance** on the review process
- HE Minister Jo Johnson who made a keynote **speech** at the Universities UK Conference setting out the five guiding principles (improved teaching quality, widened participation, simpler entry for new HE providers, easier provider access to degree awarding powers, simpler research framework) underpinning his HE strategy and likely to form the basis of the forthcoming HE Green (discussion) Paper
- Nicky Morgan who limbered up for the Rugby World Cup by launching a scheme whereby **rugby clubs can work with schools** to help 'instil character and discipline'
- Schools Minister Nick Gibb who spoke about teaching and learning styles and the importance of tried and tested methods in a **speech** to the ResearchEd Conference last weekend
- The DfE who have confirmed that they intend to amend the school Admissions Code to allow **summer born children** to be admitted to school later
- **Sir Claus Moser**, a leading figure in both UK and global education who notably contributed to UK higher education and basic skills, whose death was reported last weekend
- The OECD who announced that their annual health check on the performance of education systems around the world, '**Education at a Glance,**' will be published later than usual this year on 24 November to allow for changes in classification
- CIPD and Edge who following the HE Minister's speech this week, issued a statement standing by their claims that current stats fail to recognise the extent of **graduate over-qualification**
- Universities UK who have been commissioned to head up a **taskforce** and develop a code of practice to help universities tackle issues of violence against women on campuses
- **Nick Hillman**, Director of the HE Policy Institute, **Baroness Sharp** and new Universities UK President **Dame Julia Goodfellow** who have all made powerful cases this week for part-time students in HE
- Lecturecapture (self-explanatory) and Laundrapp (tells you where you can get your laundry done,) two of the most useful apps for student life cited in a **list** provided by the Daily Telegraph as undergrads prepare for the new university year
- Universities UK who submitted their **proposals** to the Treasury's Spending Review calling among other things for better funding for high-cost subjects, R/D and teaching
- The Association of Colleges who also sent their **wish list** to the Spending Review with more 19+ loans and better funding for 16-18 yr olds among the 10 proposals
- NIACE and Inclusion, now working together, who submitted thoughts from **the adult and employment world** to the Spending Review including using part of the Apprenticeship Levy to help protect the quality and access of apprenticeships
- NFER who looked at the work of **Regional Schools Commissioners** showing how their role pans out in different regions
- The Fabian Society who stressed the importance of partnerships as part of a new national constitution for the schools system in a report entitled '**Stakeholder Schools**'

- Ofsted who published a **report on key stage 3** raising concerns that in many schools this stage was not being given sufficient priority and support
- Ofqual and the DfE who have launched further **consultation** on the content and assessment of the 2017 batch of reformed GCSEs and A levels
- GCSE youngsters in Wales who started **Wales only qualifications** that included a particular emphasis on literacy and numeracy
- 100 schools where a sample of perhaps lucky teenagers will be able to start school an hour later in an **experiment** to see if an extra hour's sleep can help boost GCSE results
- Teachers and others who have been asked to submit ideas to the Teachers' Professional Development Group on a new national standard for **teacher CPD**
- BT who have announced plans to step up its support for tech literacy in schools with the aim of reaching 400,000 primary school children over the coming year through its **Barefoot Computing programme**
- **Facebook** who have confirmed a further move into education in the US by pledging to provide free educational software that can help with personalised learning in schools
- **Parent Info**, the new online service supported by the DfE, to help parents keep up to speed with their children in anything from understanding teenspeak to more serious issues of health and awareness
- The NAHT who published a **report** highlighting some of the challenges involved in extending free childcare places as proposed under the government's Childcare Bill
- The **TES** who in recognition of the Queen's milestone this week looked up the TES published in 1952 and found that some education issues (teacher recruitment, mental health) hadn't changed much
- ITV who is calling on anyone who fancies making a 'dramatic' pledge in public to change their lives perhaps through learning or training to get in touch for a **new show** being hosted by Davina McCall

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Aristotle taught while doing it, Bertrand Russell did it for an hour every evening, Nietzsche was at it all day long."* (Walking, apparently) [@timeshighered](#)
- *"Fairly confident that the point at which the DfE knows what a teen acronym means is the point where actual teens have stopped using it."* [@gabyhinsliff](#)
- *"Big school can be bewildering but give your Year 7s a human satnav to follow and they'll never get lost."* [@tes](#)
- *"Academics are being forced into writing books nobody can buy."* [@GdnHigherEd](#)
- *"Sir Michael Wilshaw: reality shows like Educating Cardiff are deterring would-be teachers."* [@ed_ontap](#)
- *"BT chief ex Gavin Patterson: Young people are surrounded by technology yet few understand how it works."* [@tes](#)
- *"I can't decide what's worse: assessment software companies or assessment without levels consultants. It's a tough one."* [@ChrisPadden](#)
- *"Parents told not to boast about kid's exam results on Facebook in case it upsets others."* [@ow.ly//RRRsq](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- *"We don't need Nobel physicists running car parks. We want the scientists focused on science."* The HE Minister on the need to simplify the research regulatory regime
- *"I think fragile is the way to put it."* Nicky Morgan on the current state of FE
- *"I look upon the next 5 years with great excitement, anticipating the new practices that will emerge due to greater school autonomy."* Nick Gibb gets excited at the ResearchEd Conference last weekend
- *"Too many school leaders treat key stage 3 as the poor relation of key stages 4 and 5."* Ofsted finds key stage 3 a cause for concern
- *"The question is why they lose interest because it is there at key stages 1 and 2."* The director of Code Club UK is concerned about why girls appear to lose interest in computing in their teenage years
- *"Parents of summer born children should have the right to defer the start of their education so that their children do not suffer developmental and education problems."* Stephen Hammond MP hosting a debate in the House of Commons on summer-born children
- *"We should not mourn the end of levels but the mode of their passing has left much to be desired."* NAHT's general secretary on life without national curriculum assessment levels
- *"Personally, I do not think teachers are always best placed to actually teach lessons on mental health, although some do so magnificently."* The new mental health champion for schools on who's best placed to offer young people help

Number(s) of the week

- £20,000. What some STEM degree subjects cost to provide and why some universities want to see the tuition fee raised for these subjects
- 4.4%. The unemployment rate among young graduates in the government's latest (April – June) stats
- 2/3. The number of parents, who in a survey by E.ON, described their understanding of STEM subjects as 'average' or even 'poor'
- 22. The number of new build schools opening this month under the government's Priority School Building Programme. (The aim is 500+ schools)
- 1,237. The number of 'active' education blogs churning away in the UK according to the Schools Minister in his speech last weekend
- 50. How many times a day 30% of us check our smartphones in a survey by Deloitte

What to look out for next week

- Announcement of Labour leader (Saturday)
- MPs Questions to the BIS Dept (Tuesday)
- OECD PISA report on digital skills (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session with Sir Michael Wilshaw (Wednesday)
- And coming up: Pearson and the London Knowledge Lab are offering three high profile events with leading thinkers examining how smarter digital tools can improve learning. The first event will be hosted in London on 22 Sept with follow-up events on 15 Oct and 17 Nov. Details and booking [here](#)