

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 15 May 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

Gradually things are returning to normal; the posters are down, the recriminations more reflective and attention is turning to what the future holds under a new majority Conservative government. Next week, the Speaker will be selected and new MPs sworn in and the week after, the Queen will announce what will be in the new government's first legislative programme where Bills on School Commissioners, City Devolution, the tax lock, welfare reform, free childcare and counter terrorism are already being touted. As the Prime Minister was keen to stress both on the steps of Downing Street and in his first cabinet meeting; *'we're the Party of working people...we're here to give everyone in the country the chance to make the most of their life,'* so let's get on with it. It's an approach dubbed *'blue collar Conservatism.'*

Elsewhere there's been considerable speculation as to what might be in store for the world of education where, as the blogger and education researcher Tom Bennett remarked this week, both Nicky Morgan and Sajid Javid will have their work cut out just reading all the blogs telling them what to do. Further details can be seen in an accompanying Pocket Watch but clearly funding remains the big worry for many in the education system with all sectors voicing concerns. The manifesto spells out a two-stage plan to get rid of the deficit that will take us up to 2019/20 when, to quote from page 9 of the document: *"after a surplus has been achieved, spending will grow in line with GDP."* Living in an age of austerity thus remains the continuing normal for at least the next 4/5 years.

Funding may concentrate the minds but there is another strong theme running through Conservative education plans and that is about improving levels of performance. This week's report from the OECD on basic skill levels among young people and the ONS update on UK productivity have both laid bare the size of the challenge on learning and skills. The new government is clearly looking for each sector to up its game with a range of mechanisms such as more powerful Regional Commissioners for schools, more forensic outcome measures for FE and a new teaching quality framework for HE, all being lined up. The analogy between education leaders and football managers, both focused on results, has already been made.

Finally, and further evidence of things returning to familiar routines, the testing and exam season is upon us and the media has been full of well-meaning advice for families and young people as the pressures mount. Examples of this are quoted below but as the BBC's Education page put it: *"there are only two things that a parent can ever say to a teenager taking exams: the wrong thing and the wrong thing."*

Top headlines this week

- 'Children as young as 10 smoke before exams, survey suggests.' (**Monday**)
- 'Morgan pledges to tackle 'poor' schools.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'No big changes in DfE's ministerial line-up as Nick Gibb is retained.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Sector stands by for battle over cuts, fees and Europe.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Legislation on taking over 'coasting' schools planned within weeks.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- George Osborne who confirmed in his first major keynote **speech** of the new government, that the forthcoming Queen's Speech will include a City Devolution Bill to help stimulate local economies and skills planning
- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who back in the hot seat, **indicated** that her priorities would include tackling poor school performance and rebuilding bridges with the teaching profession
- Sajid Javid, the new BIS Secretary who indicated that apprenticeships, jobs and youth training would remain priorities as some of the media questioned the long-term future of BIS
- Jim O'Neill who has been appointed as Commercial Secretary to the Treasury to help drive the city devo max and local infrastructure agendas along
- The European Commission who have published **plans** for an EU wide 'digital single market' intended in time to be able to compete with the big US internet giants
- 'Confident creators,' 'the held back' and 'the safety firsters,' the three digital tribes identified in the RSA's report on the '**The New Digital Learning Age**' for which a number of strategic solutions, including a new approach for learning technology in schools, is proposed
- **FutureLearn** who claim that their 'Understanding IELTS: Techniques for English Language Tests' Mooc course has attracted record numbers of students
- Universities UK who have announced **plans** to step up their campaign to ensure the UK stays in the EU not least because it brings benefits to UKHE
- Aaron Porter, former president of the NUS, who **blogged** about whether a rise in tuition fees might be on the cards during the lifetime of the forthcoming Parliament
- Professor Kathryn Mitchell, deputy vice-chancellor at the University of West London who will take over as vice-chancellor at the University of Derby from September
- The Core Cities group covering England's 8 largest cities outside London, who have launched a **Devolution Declaration** calling for a range of responsibilities including those over local skills and jobs to be devolved to approved City-Regions
- Sir Geoff Hall, former Principal of New College Nottingham, who is to become the new general secretary of the Principals' Professional Council
- The OECD who published their biggest **report** so far on how well countries are doing in raising basic skill levels among young people and which saw the UK ranked 20th out of the 76 core countries surveyed. (Hong Kong-China, Estonia and Korea came 1st, 2nd, 3rd)
- The OECD who published a challenging **Report** on the Swedish school system highlighting three necessary reform areas (teaching and learning, quality with equity, accountability)
- Chris Cook, Policy editor on Newsnight who **blogged** about the budget squeeze facing schools after the election
- Head teacher Tom Sherrington who wrote an open **letter** to Nicky Morgan both welcoming her back and urging her to help with funding, curriculum reform and teacher recruitment
- The professional body, **ASCL**, who will run a series of seminars over coming months to help schools deal with their new responsibilities in preventing young people from being drawn into radicalisation
- The unions who have joined arms to urge the new government to protect education spending

- Ofsted who published new **data** highlighting significant gender imbalances in the take-up of A level subjects like English and Physics
- Ofqual who **reported** back on its recent consultation about which GCSE and A level subjects will or will not be developed for 2017
- The accountancy firm PwC who **announced** they will end their reliance on A level grade scores when selecting graduate recruits
- Amanda Spielman, chair of Ofqual, whose **call** not to get too hung up on exam grades was welcomed in some quarters
- The Creative Industries and Institute of Civil Engineers who published a **report** calling for the creative arts to be given as much attention as STEM subjects in the school curriculum
- Professor Robin Alexander, Director of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust who **highlighted** some of the policy challenges in primary education facing a new government
- *"You'll kick yourself if you've only missed by one mark."* One of a number of worst things a parent can say to a child preparing for an exam according to a listing by **BBC Education**

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"It's like freshers' week in the Commons with registration desks for new MPs."* @SkyAnushka
- *"Pretty much same team of DfE ministers minus David Laws means continuity +no learning curve."* @GregHurstTimes
- *"Best piece of exam advice: Look up for inspiration; down in desperation but never sideways for information!"* @GuardianTeach
- *"Don't get hung up on grades says exams watchdog boss."* @tes
- *"Gove was the Kevin Pieterston of politics, smashing lots of sixes but not making many friends and leaving the job half done, says Seldon."* @pwatsonmontrose

Acronym(s) of the Week

- EFA. Not just the Education Funding Agency but also 'Education for All,' the driving force behind the World Education Forum's global education objectives which will be reviewed and updated at next week's global gathering

Quote(s) of the week

- *"We've got far more to do. That's why I want another five years of standards, discipline and rigour in our schools."* David Cameron on what lies ahead for schools under a Conservative government
- *"It's about listening, it's about hearing what they've got to say, tackling things like workload, Ofsted inspections and building on all the lessons I've learned in the last 10 months."* Nicky Morgan on how she views her future priorities
- *"Coasting schools can give the appearance of achieving good results when they should in fact be doing a lot better."* Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Schools builds up the case for school improvement
- *"To some extent, you and your predecessor put enough changes in place to keep us busy for five years so don't go crazy looking for things to do."* Headteacher Tom Sherrington pens his advice to Nicky Morgan

- *"The world is full of examples of improvements in education and there is no time to lose."* OECD education director Andreas Schleicher as he introduces the organisation's latest report on the importance of basic skills

Number(s) of the week

- 32%. The number of MPs in the new House of Commons who have had a private education according to research from the Sutton Trust
- 24. The number of MPs who have had some experience of working in education either as teachers or in other roles
- £750m. The amount of money raised through fundraising and alumni over the last three years by Oxford University as it looks to hit its initial target of £2bn
- £2trillion. How much the OECD reckon could be added to the UK's economy by the end of the century if by 2030, all school leavers reach minimum levels of basic skills
- 735,000. The latest youth unemployment figure, down 5,000 on the last quarter
- 4. The number of reasons to be cheerful about a Tory government **according** to one head teacher
- 8 seconds. What our attention span has now dropped to, one second less than the proverbial goldfish, according Microsoft research

What to look out for next week

- House of Commons re-assembles (Monday)
- World Education Forum meets to set the new global education development agenda (Tuesday – Friday)