

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 16 October 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.)

The week summed up

No higher ed Green Paper this week as had been widely anticipated, instead, as the listing below shows, schools and exams have been filling the headlines.

The main story has been about the opening of a new grammar school 'annexe' in Kent. The government has been very circumspect in how it's presenting the decision to approve it: *'this will better meet the needs of parents,' 'it's a genuine expansion of an existing school,' 'it doesn't reflect a change in policy'* and so on but inevitably it's provoked a lot of debate and the Labour Party has called for an official explanation. For many, the approval sits awkwardly with the Prime Minister's *"no more children with their noses pressed to the window as they watch the world moving ahead without them"* social mobility speech just a week ago and a key issue will be how far this is a one-off and what impact this has on the planning of school provision in the future. Time will tell.

Exams and exam performance has been the other big schools story this week partly because the government has decided to publish 'provisional' exam performance data early this year to help parents making choices about secondary schools and partly because Ofqual has been in front of the Education Committee this week answering questions on exams and much more.

On the performance data which as ASCL's Brian Lightman said, *'should come with a hefty health warning'* as it's still only partial, the broad picture is no great change between 2014 and 2015. Slightly more state school pupils (0.2%) achieved 5 A*-Cs, slightly fewer (0.1%) took EBacc subjects largely because of a drop in entries for languages and at L3, the average point score per vocational entry continued to rise. The formal performance tables by the way will be published in the normal way in January. As for exams generally, Ofqual was tackled on a range of issues including exam reform, GCSE grading, numbers of examiners and marking generally by the new Education Committee this week. Much of it was traditional stuff but a particular issue and one highlighted on the BBC website this week is that of appeals about marks and whether this is being used strategically to raise results in parts of the school system. Ofqual's evidence suggests that despite the rise in requests, the number of grades actually changing as a result is very small...but it is going to consult all the same.

So no HE Green Paper this week but decks clear for next week or soon after. Speculation remains rife as to what might be in the Paper as Mark Leach's expert [piece](#) in the Guardian this week indicated although broad details were evident in the Minister's speech last month. One thing that may arrive from HE next week however is a big bag of washing. According to train companies the third weekend of October, generally one month into term, is peak time for uni student travel; time to clear more decks.

Top headlines this week

- 'New wave of super-sized secondary schools planned.' (**Monday**)
- 'Exam boards' reform will lead to Corbynesque solution. (**Tuesday**)
- 'Is the cost of exam re-marking putting off state schools?' (**Wednesday**)
- 'First new grammar school in 50 years,' (**Thursday**)
- 'We're Mystic Meg: head teachers left in dark over new exams.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Nicky Morgan, whose **decision** to approve a new grammar school 'annexe' in Kent has attracted considerable comment
- BIS whose commissioned **report** published at the end of last week has a mass of useful data showing how effectively FE contributes to seven of the key social mobility indicators
- The BIS Committee who held a witness session with the Business Secretary and his Permanent Secretary on the work of the Dept, video link [here](#)
- The DfE, who as promised earlier this year, published provisional performance results from this year's **GCSE, A level and vocational** exams in an effort to get info out early to parents applying for secondary school places
- The DfE who pointed to **figures** published this week showing that more 5 year olds than ever were achieving the expected standards in maths and literacy under the early years foundation stage profile
- The Institute for Fiscal Studies who published a helpful **summary** of how things are shaping up for Dept spending under the 2015 Spending Review where both education Depts are likely to face cuts
- The Institute for Government who offered an interesting **analysis** of the current 38 devolution bids now submitted noting that 80% included devolution of skills planning and commissioning
- Deputy Director at the CBI, **Katja Hall** who is moving to a new job next month as Group Head of Public Affairs at HSBC
- **Roger Pope**, Principal of Kingsbridge Community College in Devon, who has added to his duties by becoming Chair of the National College of Teaching and Leadership as well
- Universities UK Vice-President **Janet Beer** who has joined the board of the 'Keep Britain In Europe ' campaign to fly the flag for HE and higher learning opportunities generally
- London Met University which **announced** that it will consolidate its provision around its main Holloway Road campus from Sept 2017
- HEFCE who made its point by publishing the results of an independent **survey** indicating high levels of client support and satisfaction with its work. The sector skill group People 1st who have added their **voice** to the concerns about the apprenticeship levy
- Ernst and Young who emerged as the UK's top company for employing apprentices and school leavers in the latest **RateMyApprenticeship** listing
- ESOL, the focus of a **rally** in London this week protesting against the government's decision to cut funding for the ESOL mandation programme
- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) who have been given the green light to go ahead and lead development of new **functional skills standards** for introduction from 2018
- The British Chambers of Commerce whose **survey** of business and education leaders found overwhelming support for the return of work experience for under 16s
- Ofqual Chief Regulator Glenys Stacy whose **speech** to the Westminster Education Forum this week outlined how the development of new GCSEs and A levels and other current issues around exam reviews and appeals
- Glenys Stacey and Amanda Spielman who both appeared before the **Education Committee** this week answering questions on exam reform, GCSE grading, marking, appeals and the National Reference Test

- Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission who have launched a consultation on **inspecting** how effectively local areas are meeting special educational needs requirements
- The think tank Demos whose commissioned **research** for its 'Mind over Matter' report identified that students were less happy and more anxious towards the end of their secondary schooling than at the beginning
- Northern Ireland's National Children's Bureau whose **report** 'ICT and Me' found that while there was no statistically significant link between mobile phone use and GCSE performance, there was between excessive use of gaming and GCSE exam performance
- The Competition and Markets Authority who have **written** to schools to remind them that parents should be free to shop around when it comes to buying school uniforms rather than be tied into a particular retailer
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell's classic tome which is listed as 4th in the Booksellers Association **top 20** academic books that have changed the world. (No 1 was Stephen Hawking's 'A Brief History of Time')

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Prof Richard Pring@UniofOxford: the most centralised system of education since Calvin's days in the 1th century." @Adrian_Hilton*
- *"@JeyyLowe: Anyone arguing in favour of grammars is talking out of their anecdote." @miss_mcinerney*
- *"#ASCLInfo: 69% still planning to enter all students for AS levels." @brianlightman*

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Do bankers deserve their bonuses?"* One of a number of possible interview questions facing candidates applying to Oxford University as it seeks to delve into their reasoning powers and thought processes
- *"FE doesn't stand for featherbedding the economy but further education."* Emeritus UCL Professor Frank Coffield on the need for teaching staff as much as local employers to be involved in the current area-based reviews of the FE sector
- *"It was careless of government to end compulsory work experience in 2012 but it is not too late to correct the decision."* The D.G. of the British Chambers of Commerce reporting on their latest employers' survey
- *"If you play darts every day you get good at subtracting from 501. The reason that so many of us believe that we can't do maths is largely psychological."* Mike Ellicock, CEO of National Numeracy talks about the challenge of maths at this week's World Maths Day
- *"Let the senior leadership team take over someone's teaching for a day so that they can observe another teacher's practice in a focused way."* One of 13 tips from Sir Tim Brighouse, **listed** on the TES website, to help improve teacher CPD and morale
- *"There is no reason why an academic core curriculum should in any way imperil a cultural education or vice versa."* Schools Minister Nick Gibb at the launch of a new initiative to boost cultural education in schools

Number(s) of the week

- 1.7m. The latest (June – August) unemployment total, down 79,000 on the previous quarter

- 872,300. The number of people on government funded apprenticeships during the 2014-15 academic year according to the latest [statistical release](#)
- 19,200. The number of people who started a traineeship last year according to the latest [statistical release](#)
- 38.6%. The number of state school pupils entered for the EBacc, down 0.1% but with 23.9% achieving the full measure according to the DfE's provisional KS4 'exam' results published this week
- 3,102. How many maths teachers will need to be in training next year, up 20%, according to DfE [figures](#)
- 7%. The increase over the last 10 years in the number of children in 'kinship care' (being brought up by relatives) according to [research](#) from the University of Bristol
- 75%. The number of 5 year olds reaching the expected level of maths in the early years foundation stage according to the government's latest statistics

What to look out for next week

- Public Accounts Committee witness session on the financial health of the FE sector (Monday)
- Policy Exchange/ASCL ½ day seminar on the 'Future of the Teaching Workforce.' (Monday)
- AELP Autumn Conference (Tuesday)
- LEP Summit (Tuesday)
- Education Committee Inquiry session into the role of Regional Schools Commissioners (Wed)
- Westminster Hall debate on the UK Science Budget and the Spending Review (Wed)
- FAB (Federation of Awarding Bodies) Conference (Thursday, Friday)