

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 18 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

Corbyn, computers and curriculum make the headlines this week as follows.

Corbyn, or more precisely Labour first where with a new Shadow Cabinet now in post there's been much interest in how Labour policy will shape up. When it comes to education we have new Shadow Secretaries of State at both DfE and BIS and both have been in the news this week. Lucy Powell, the new Shadow Education Secretary, has been grilled by the Times Ed today where her views on academies and free schools, in effect that they should be brought under local control, has made the headlines. That is a marked difference from her predecessor's position and has inevitably pleased some and disappointed others. Writing earlier in the week, Policy Exchange's Jonathan Simons, suggested that her approach would be pragmatic although there may some 'eye-catching' announcements; time will tell if this one. Over at BIS, Angela Eagle had an early opportunity to make her mark with questions to BIS Ministers on Tuesday afternoon. Her questions on apprenticeships and skill shortages showed that she recognised some of the issues but in truth it was too early to pick up any new agenda; that will come as the spending review details emerge. As for HE where of course Jeremy Corbyn had promised to scrap tuition fees, nothing yet although an interesting set of views from HE specialists can be found on the [Guardian](#) website.

And so to computers, the subject of a major report this week from the OECD and of a Paper at the BERA Conference both raising questions about the impact of technology in the classroom. The argument, and it was well put by the government's behaviour adviser Tom Bennett, is that we have become in his words "*dazzled*" by technology, believing it can transform classroom learning and raise results without any real understanding about how it should best be used. The OECD published a mass of data pointing to the fact that many of the best-performing countries were "*very cautious about using technology in the classroom.*" The use of technology and indeed of smart devices generally by young people is the subject of considerable debate at present, no one is suggesting a Canute like position but it's an interesting example of an education debate where the expectation has preceded the evidence. We haven't heard the last.

Finally for this week, the curriculum, where the government has finally set out its thoughts on the issue of assessment without levels, essentially recognising that more training and support is needed. And Ofqual has resorted to traditional lines of communication with the publication of its series of mini postcards explaining in simple terms many of the changes being implemented at present. These range from the 'new' adult qualification framework, not QCF from October 1st but RQF (the R stands for regulated) to the new GCSE grading criteria. They're in the post.

Top headlines this week

- 'Smart phones could face ban from classes.' (**Monday**)
- 'Computers do not improve pupils' results says OECD.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Tories now the heir to Blair on schools.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'State students outperform private in degree grades.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Head teachers call for end to pupil premium amid plans for funding overhaul.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who made a major **speech** last weekend outlining 3 principles (reform, devolution and efficiency) for state reform ahead of the forthcoming Spending Review
- The UK which was ranked in the top five countries (along with Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands and the USA) for effective innovation in the latest **Global Innovation Index** of 141 nations
- Luciana Berger, who was appointed Labour's Shadow Minister for mental health, the first time such a role has been created
- Lucy Powell the new Shadow Education Secretary who in an **interview** in the TES has indicated a marked changing in party policy by suggesting academies and free schools could be brought under local accountability
- The Chair of the Education Committee whose **letter** to the Education Secretary following their recent Q/A session seeks further information on a couple of funding matters
- The think tank Policy Exchange who have published a **collection of essays** by leading educationalists to mark its Annual Lecture given this year by E.D.Hirsch
- **The Education and Adoption Bill** which completed its passage through the House of Commons and now passes to the House of Lords with a 2nd Reading on 20 Oct
- The BIS Committee which has announced that it will launch an **inquiry** into quality assessment in HE with particular reference to the role of the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework
- Cambridge, Oxford, UCL, Imperial and Kings, all in the top 20 in the latest **World Ranking** of Universities
- Quality assessment arrangements in HE where **consultation** on future approaches closes today
- The new **Prevent guidance**, aimed at tackling those at risk of radicalisation in universities and colleges which comes into force next week
- HEFCE who found that in many cases state school graduates tended to achieve higher degree grades than their independent school counterparts in a **report** looking at the impact of different course and student characteristics on degree outcomes in 2014
- The **New College of Humanities** which reached its first graduation ceremony in unusual style by commissioning original works of art displaying the particular skills of each of its first 36 graduates
- **Durham University**, who according to the price comparison website Money Supermarket, offers the cheapest pint of beer (@£2.10) of any university
- The CBI who have called for protected funding for education and skills and support for vocational skills in its **submission** to the Treasury Spending Review
- Apprenticeships, where the statutory definition which was consulted on over the summer, was included in Part 4 of the **Enterprise Bill** laid before Parliament this week
- BIS who published 2006/8 -2012 data on progression into HE by groups of **apprenticeships** and **FE students**
- HEFCE, UVAC and the SFA who have joined forces to produce a **guide** for universities and colleges thinking of offering Degree Apprenticeships
- Jaguar Land Rover who have recruited a record **number** of graduates and apprentices (600) in its intake this year

- The AoC and Oxford University's Centre for Skills who will work together to examine the impact of the government's **local devolution** of skills with a report due next summer
- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) who published **English Pipeline**, a series of training and resource materials to help those teaching English in FE provision
- The charity National Numeracy who launched its new **Family Maths Toolkit** stuffed with tips and activities to help families learn and enjoy maths together
- The OECD whose **report** on the use of computers in schools raised a number of questions about their validity as a learning tool
- Dr Tom Macintyre who presented further evidence this week in a **Paper** to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) questioning the impact of technology in the classroom
- The Careers and Enterprise Company who are rolling out a **new network** of business volunteers or Enterprise Advisers to help bring schools, colleges and the world of work more closely together
- Regional Schools Commissioners, for whom the Education Committee has been gathering **views** ahead of its planned inquiry
- ASCL, NGA and education lawyers Browne Jackson who have got together to produce a **guide** for school leaders and governors who are considering working together in collaborative arrangements
- Ofqual who sent out a series of 8 'plain speak' **postcards** to explain the various changes to GCSE, AS and A levels in England as well as to the **adult skills** qualification system
- The DfE who have agreed to set up a national bank of assessment questions but not yet an expert group to help schools operate assessment systems now that the framework of national curriculum **assessment levels** has been removed
- Tom Bennett, whose review into behavioural issues in schools has been extended to take in the **use of smartphones** and other such devices in school
- SchoolDash, a new **website** being developed by a data entrepreneur to help make sense of the mass of data coming out on school performance these days
- *"Ridiculous,"* one of the professional body responses to a proposal from the New Schools Network to introduce a 'parental trigger' that could be used to remove head teachers
- Writing letters, something that can help children with their writing skills according to a survey by the **National Literacy Trust** to mark Letter Writing Week

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Apparently @NickyMorgan01 vs @LucyMPowell is the 3rd time two women have faced each other over education." @RichardVaughan* (Spoiler: Williams v Thatcher and Morris V May were the other two)
- *"Fair to say that @TristramHunt and I don't see eye to eye, mainly because he's several inches taller than me @NickyMorgan01." @SchoolsWeek*
- *"Schools are not gifts which can be dished out to ministers' friends and party donors says @KevinBrennanMP" @SchoolsWeek*
- *"Edge calls for 'Polytechnic Colleges' instead of National Colleges and Institutes of Technology @ukEdgehttp://data.parliament.uk/written evidence." @davidharbourne*
- *"More evidence is needed to convince firms to sign up apprentices." @tesfenews*

- “*Cunningham’s Law: The best way to get the right answer on the internet is not to ask a question, it’s to post the wrong answer.*” [@tech_faq](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “*We will say to any local authority failing its children: transform the way you provide services or those services will be taken over by non-profit trusts or partnerships.*” The PM in his keynote speech on state reform
- “*We now have a very strong education system in this country and I hope the Labour Party will join me in rooting out the remaining problems and education failures where they are in this country.*” The Education Secretary ‘welcomes’ the new Labour leader
- “*Being shadow minister for anything is not for the faint-hearted.*” Professor Chris Husband [blogs](#) on the challenges facing the new Shadow Education Secretary
- “*We are always concerned about increases in fees.*” The Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University reacts unfavourably to any suggested increase in fees
- “*This is the worst financial scenario we’ve ever faced.*” Dr Lynne Sedgemore, who recently retired as executive director of the 157 Group, reflects on her 35 years in FE
- “*It’s like a bookcase in a library with qualifications indexed by their level and size.*” Ofqual’s Director of Voc Quals describes the new RQF (Regulated Qualifications Framework)
- “*A ritual torture that takes place throughout the school year.*” The Guardian’s Secret Teacher on school Inset days
- “*The impact on student performance is mixed at best.*” The OECD reports on its survey into the use of computers in schools

Number(s) of the week

- 300. The number of MPs who voted for the Education Bill in its 3rd Reading this week against 200 ‘Noes’
- 20,000. The number of public respondents who submitted ideas to the Spending Review
- 38. The number of area proposals submitted to the government for local devolution deals, a lot more than anticipated according to the Prime Minister
- 30. How many universities the UK had in the QS world top ranking 200 universities, only the US had more
- 12-15 yr olds. Nearly a quarter of whom wake in the night to use social media in a [survey](#) published by Cardiff University

What to look out for next week

- Lib-Dem Annual Party Conference (Saturday-Wednesday)
- A reminder about the first of the Pearson hosted ‘Intelligence Unleashed’ seminars which takes place on Tuesday 22nd September. You can join this Open Ideas event [Intelligence Unleashed: How smarter digital tools can improve learning](#) online, full link: <http://livestream.com/accounts/15105777/AIED> if you’re unable to attend in person