

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 3 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

It's been hard to avoid the coasting word this week. It was the subject of considerable discussion when the Education Secretary offered her definition during this week's debate on the current Education Bill and although he didn't use the term directly, the common view was that this was what the Universities Minister had in his sights when he addressed Universities UK also this week.

Coasting has become for the moment at least, the defining word of the government's education agenda, the latest weapon in the battle of public service reform. As Tony Blair found with his famous 'scars on my back' speech, it can be a battle and there have been plenty of concerns expressed this week about the government's latest approach. For schools where Laura McNerney offered a useful summary in [Schools Week](#), the issues seem to be threefold: definition, impact and the punitive nature of the whole exercise. The definition of 60% rather than 40% of pupils achieving the current '5 good GCSE' benchmark is certainly challenging and if applied blindly would fail to credit those who pull themselves up to just below that benchmark often from a low base, an obvious concern. In terms of impact, the government suggests 'hundreds' of schools could be affected, some experts suggest thousands; we shan't know until at least 2016. As for being punitive, there's always a difficult balance to be struck here but an over-reliance on a heavy testing regime does not, as Anthony Seldon suggests below, make for happy schools with happy kids; getting the balance right is not easy.

While schools have been confronting the issue of coasting, higher education has been facing its own quality issues. On Monday HEFCE issued its latest update on its review of quality assessment arrangements. Fewer systems and processes and more use of data, external examiners and institution's own assurance arrangements seems to be the order of the day here. Further consultation will now run to mid Sept. Part of the problem is meshing these arrangements into the government's own commitment to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which the Minister endorsed in a major speech later in the week. In a wide-ranging speech, he surprised many by also expressing interest in a more detailed profile of student achievement to run alongside the current hons system and in encouraging universities to be more responsive to business and learner needs, potentially through new accountability measures.

It has also been an important week for FE although those biting their nails ahead of the Chancellor's Statement next week, where according to the headline in today's TESFE, the sector's very future is at stake, may feel it's next week that counts. This week's reports by Alison Wolf on apprenticeships and McDonalds on 'soft' skills, confirm however, the importance of the sector.

Top headlines this week

- 'Vocational qualifications increasingly valued by employers, survey says.' (**Monday**)
- 'Coasting schools face tough exam targets.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'McDonalds; soft skills must be formalised and recognised.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Degree classifications must change to stop students coasting, says Minister.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Rise in school teacher vacancies in England.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Jo Johnson who in his second major **speech** since becoming Universities Minister confirmed that the government will publish a green discussion paper this autumn on developing a framework for teaching excellence in HE
- Nicky Morgan who, as the Education Bill reached its Committee stage, **set out** how a coasting school will be defined
- Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith who **announced** that pupil attainment at age 16 will be used as one of the measures of Child Poverty under new legislation
- The Education Committee where out of the 10 members appointed this week, eight are female, with seven of these being newly elected in May 2015
- The **DfE** and the **NFER**, each of whom published data rich reports on Academy performance over the last year but with definitive conclusions still some way off
- The Childcare Minister who announced that requisite levels of GCSE English and maths would become an exit rather than an entry **requirement** for childcare apprentices although the issue of functional skills remains
- The DfE who issued new safeguarding advice for schools and childcare providers to help protect children from radicalisation as the new Prevent **regulations** came into force
- The DfE who following criticisms that no such register existed, have **announced** that a national database of school governors will now be established
- Jon Thompson, Permanent Secretary at the MoD, who has been appointed as Civil Service Social Mobility Champion
- Carolyn Fairbairn, a former journalist and media executive, who has been appointed to succeed John Cridland as director general of the CBI at the end of the year
- Professor Stuart Croft, currently provost at Warwick University, who has been appointed to succeed Sir Nigel Thrift as V.C. at Warwick from next February
- Professor Les Ebdon whose term as director of the Office of Fair Access has been extended
- Claudia Harris, a management consultant and former Labour adviser, who has been appointed as chief executive at the DfE's independent Careers and Enterprise Company
- Professor John Hattie whose Papers on 'What works and what doesn't in Education' have been attracting considerable interest and which can be found, along with accompanying discussion on the Pearson Open Ideas website **here**
- HEFCE who with the other UKHE funding agencies, published the results of its initial **review of quality assessment** in HE and launched a further consultation that will run until mid Sept on some of the emerging principles
- The Universities UK grouping of university leaders who have **called** on the government to raise the £9000 tuition fee cap in line with inflation and for the maintenance grant to be increased at the same time
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs,) many of whom called for greater devolution of funding to help tackle skills issues in a report on '**What next for LEPs?**' by PWC and the Smith Institute
- Professor Alison Wolf who followed up her earlier report on adult skills funding with a further broadside on apprenticeship funding, **calling** for a new National Apprenticeship Fund, sourced by a levy on employers to fund the training, leaving government to fund the education component

- UKCES and Centrefor cities who offered a qualified thumbs-up for local growth deals in a **report** looking at demand-led local employment and skills systems
- McDonalds who have been leading a **campaign** to promote and recognise 'soft skills' and who have announced that it will work with a group of partners including the CBI, Pearson and the AoC to take forward the recommendations from its recent survey report
- The National Audit Office (NAO) who reported on how the **pupil premium** was working and found that while it had raised the profile of disadvantaged pupils, it had yet to engender any major impact
- The Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Fund who hosted a landmark stocktake **summit** on the pupil premium so far and how it should be deployed to best effect over the next 5 years
- Ofsted who have launched a brief **consultation** on revisions to the way in which it publishes stats on inspection outcomes for maintained schools and academies
- Professor Chris Husbands who called for a more coherent strategy around initial teacher training in his latest **blog** in the IoE's series of 'expert' opinion pieces
- The DfE who have launched a **consultation** on changes to the subject content of GCSE Design and Technology
- The think tank Demos who launched a **report** calling for non-formal learning to be more widely embedded into school curricula as a way of helping develop pupil character
- NFER, Durham CEM and Early Excellence, **confirmed** this week as authorised providers of the baseline assessments for four and five year olds that will be used to measure pupil progress in future
- Book Trust whose latest research as part of their '**Read On. Get On**' campaign found that many disadvantaged children without requisite reading skills, especially boys, started school 15 months behind their more advantaged peers
- Edge and the TES who have identified Emmerdale as the soap opera with the most characters likely to have a vocational qualification (followed in order by Corrie and EastEnders)
- '*Storyteller*' by Josie Picoult, '*The Power of One*' by Bryce Courtenay and '*Us*' by David Nicholls, three of the books recommended by teachers for any reading time this summer

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"We should offer a red carpet not an obstacle course for international students."*
@AaronPorter
- *"We don't like bandying around the word crisis but there is a crisis in the recruitment of teachers and leaders."* @brianlightman
- *"Schools should be looking out for students rather than conducting surveillance on them."*
@russellhobby
- *"Nicky Morgan on the EBacc: it will end quiet discrimination"* @SchoolsWeek

Acronym(s) of the Week

- TEF. Teaching Excellence Framework, an important development for HE, in the Conservative Party's manifesto and which will be the subject of a discussion paper later this year

Quote(s) of the week

- *"I will continue to push for more (performance) data to be made available, including for alternative providers."* The Universities Minister on holding an expanding HE market to account
- *"The Teaching Excellence Framework would lead to time wasted giving tuna sandwiches to assessors (rather than supporting learning.)"* One University Principal appears less enamoured by the proposed new framework
- *"Under current budgets, it simply cannot be done."* Professor Alison Wolf on meeting the 3m apprenticeship target within current funds
- *"The value I have always placed on soft skills has helped me get to where I am today."* Entrepreneur James Caan CBE who is helping McDonalds and others lead a campaign to get soft skills recognised in schools and the workplace
- *"Recruitment is a challenge as the economy improves and competition for new graduates intensifies."* The Schools Minister on the rise in teacher vacancies
- *"Schools should strive to be happy, kind and warm places."* Sir Anthony Seldon as he reflects on his move from schools to HE
- *"Based on current performance we expect the definition to apply to hundreds of schools."* The Education Secretary on the impact of the coasting definition
- *"It signals more uncertainty and turbulence for schools, distracting them from focusing on raising standards."* The Gen Sec of the NASUWT reacts to the new coasting school definition

Number(s) of the week

- £1,143m. Annual cost to HE providers in England of existing quality assurance and quality assessment arrangements according to research **conducted** by KPMG
- Over 70%. The number of graduates who now get a First or 2:1 according to figures cited by the Universities Minister this week
- 1,179. The number of schools that could fall foul of the new coasting definition, in numbers crunched by Education Datalab
- 4,674. The number of Academies now open according to the latest Annual Report on Academies from the DfE
- 2m. The number of 5-16 yr olds who qualify for extra pupil premium funding (out of a total of 7m school-age children) according to NAO figures
- 76%. The number of private schools judged good or outstanding in recent Ofsted inspections, a drop of 1% on the previous year

What to look out for next week

- Education Bill Committee stage (Tuesday)
- Budget Statement (Wednesday)
- Education Bill Committee stage (Thursday)