

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 30 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

A mixed bag this week so let's start with some good news. 18 year olds are continuing to apply to university in large numbers according to UCAS's latest stats, a bit more money is being put into careers and enterprise guidance, and perhaps most significantly of all, the nation's primary sector has come in for a shower of praise from perhaps an unexpected quarter: the Chief Inspector.

The latter story is particularly interesting. There's been much interest recently in the 'London effect,' the improvement in performance of London schools where improvements at the primary stage has been one of the factors cited so is a Heineken effect now happening and it's spreading to other parts? Sir Michael Wilshaw thinks so: *"I think we have real grounds for optimism here."* The optimism is grounded in inspection evidence: *"there were 2,293 more good and outstanding primary schools in the last academic year than in 2011-12."* So what's fuelling this? As the quote listed below indicates, it's pretty much a return to core essentials: grammar, synthetic phonics and so on. The only downside appears to be that not enough is carried forward into key stage 3.

It hasn't all been good news this week. IPPR's *'State of the North'* report, for instance, highlighted the continuing attainment gap for many young people and the impact of deprivation on early years; the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported a similar tale highlighting the effect the recession was still having on specific groups of young people and the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee heard powerful witness testimony about how difficult it can be for some young people transitioning into work, particularly the low-skilled. For many, the Chief Inspector's comment in his Annual Report last year, that when it comes to education, we have a divided nation, still rings true and remains one of the litmus tests for the Chancellor's forthcoming spending announcements.

More immediately we have the build-up to the higher education Green Paper, due shortly, and where this week, two new interesting Papers added to the debate. The first was from the HE Policy Institute looking at the decline of part-time learning and what to do about it. Described by Nick Hillman, the HEPI director as *"arguably the single biggest problem facing higher education at the moment,"* much of the answer, given current restrictions and shortages around funding, seems to lie in the Paper's title: *'It's the Finance, Stupid!'* The second was a Paper from the university think tank million+ which ahead of the Green Paper, questioned the proposed linkage between a teaching excellence framework and any increase in fees: *"the link with fees risks a reductionist, metrics-based approach that would be based on questionable data."* The build-up to the Green Paper incidentally is well charted on the wonkhe site [here](#).

We are fortunate to have the authors of both Papers and wonkhe along with other commentators speaking at our Pearson Hot Breakfast Policy Seminar on higher education in a week's time.

Top headlines this week

- 'UCAS applications to be anonymous, says David Cameron.' (**Monday**)
- 'Sleepwalking into UK's worst teacher recruitment crisis.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Teacher shortage costing millions in supply staff.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'QAA publishes overview of Higher Education Reviews this year.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Prospects for young people have worsened, says report.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who **announced** that from 2017, individual candidate names will be removed from UCAS application forms to avoid any potential for bias
- The Chancellor who formally **launched** the National Infrastructure Commission with an initial focus on three areas: northern connectivity, London transport, and energy but where the skills pipeline will be crucial
- The Business Minister who opened a new **innovation centre** for high-tech small firms in Loughborough
- Cheshire and Warrington who become the next area to launch a **Growth Hub** to support and advise local business on matters such as the provision of skills and training
- Cabinet Minister Matt Hancock who used a **speech** to the Institute for Government to spell out how the digital revolution was helping transform public services such as education
- Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary for Schools, who made the case for **high-rise schools** as a way of tackling concerns about a lack of school places
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group which has been looking at **Mindfulness** and has included the creation of a new £1m Fund to help develop provision in schools among its recommendations
- The House of Lords **Select Committee on Social Mobility** which has been hearing a range of sometimes worrying evidence about the transition into employment for young people
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission whose latest **survey** on how far Britain is becoming a fairer society revealed that young people in general and certain groups in particular (the disabled, White boys, Black workers) had suffered under the recession
- The OECD who launched its new **Centre for Opportunity and Equality** to complement its policy activity and help focus attention on issues of social inequality
- The think tank IPPR who highlighted the closing of the attainment gap in early years, primary and secondary education as one of **four big tests** facing the architects of the Northern Powerhouse
- Instructure Research who investigated how well HE students around the world were being prepared for the world of work and **found** UK students '*overly optimistic*' about their prospects
- UCAS who **published** the first of its regular updates on how the 2016 applications are going and reported that at this mid-October stage, applications by UK 18 yr olds were up 1% on last year although total UK applications were slightly (1%) down
- The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) who published a **collection of essays** by leading commentators looking at why there had been such a drop in part-time HE student numbers, what impact this was having and what to do about it (mainly change the inflexible funding rules)
- The university think tank million+ who published a **policy briefing** challenging current government proposals to link fee levels with a teaching excellence framework
- The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) who **published** the findings from its latest round of peer reviews covering 24 HEIs and 62 colleges in which 30% of the former received commendations and 70% of the latter were deemed satisfactory
- The BIS Dept who published latest **guidance** for FE providers wishing to apply for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP)

- AELP Chief Executive Stewart Segal who **reflected** on some of the issues around apprenticeships that had been raised at his Association's recent Conference
- Previous Labour Education Ministers **Estelle Morris** and **Jim Knight** each of whom offered their thoughts on teacher recruitment in respective articles this week
- Sir Michael Wilshaw who issued the first of what are intended to be regular **commentaries** on different aspects of the education system, in this case focusing on the success of England's primary schools and the difficulties of transitioning this into secondary
- Schools Week whose **article** on why schools in certain parts of the country had managed to improve their GCSE results as reported in the government's recent interim data, attracted considerable interest
- The Careers and Enterprise Company who **announced** the launch of a £5m Investment Fund to help beef up careers and enterprise provision in so-called 'cold spots' across England
- Education correspondent Liz Lightfoot who **examined** the growing trend for super-size secondary schools noting that research on the optimum size of schools has so far proved inconclusive
- Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife who confirmed that the **new school** they intend to open will be different in concept in that it will integrate health and social care services for local families and children
- The government who launched its latest '*Your Future: Their Future*,' advertising recruitment **campaign** for teachers and faced criticisms over claims of potential salary levels
- The National Union of Teachers (NUT) who **organised** a lobby of teacher supply agencies as concerns rose about teacher supply and recruitment costs

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"If we ever want to be a profession, we need to take responsibility for our own professional practice. Time to stop waiting for superman."* **@tombennett71**
- *"Let children have five days a year of term time holidays, Netmums editor says."* **@SchoolsImprove**
- *"Tell you what I want, what I really, really want...Geri Halliwell talks Free School."* **@tonyparkin**
- *"An austerity plan for @George_Osborne: stop the regime of endless testing, it will save millions."* **@tes**
- *"Titan schools will be like cheap high-rise housing, independent head warns."* **@SchoolsImprove**

Quote(s) of the week

- *The fact remains that much teaching at university is poor and if Ofsted were to come in and assess it I think there would be very large numbers of departments that get fours and threes."* Sir Anthony Seldon on the need for a teaching qualification for academics
- *"The regulatory regime is byzantine and over-complex, expensive and time-consuming. It's virtually impossible for a new higher ed institution to come into existence."* Professor Grayling on some changes needed for the HE sector
- *"I would disagree that there is anything necessarily to be afraid of from mergers."* The FE Minister tries to reassure the FE sector about the outcomes of the current area reviews

- *"The idea of schools being on one or two floors is not essential."* The DfE's Lord Nash tells the TES that schools will need to be bigger to cope with the demand for places
- *"Today's primary school literacy lessons abound with talk of conjunctions and prepositions, of passive and active tenses, antonyms and ellipses."* The Chief Inspector relishes what's going on in the nation's primary school classrooms
- *"I think this is a brutal piece of stupidity that you can make people good at language by telling them the names of things."* Children's author Philip Pullman on proposals to develop a new course for primary school teachers to help them bone up on their grammar knowledge

Number(s) of the week

- 0.5%. The growth figures for the UK economy in the last quarter, up in the service sector but with continuing worries about a further decline among growth making sectors such as Construction and Manufacturing
- 3. The number of 'acid tests' that should be applied to any testing regime **according** to President Obama (they should only be worth taking, should only enhance teaching and learning, and should only be one source of information on a child's ability)
- £9.70. The returns to the economy and society generally for every £1 invested under the HE Innovation Fund
- £733m. How much schools in England spent on supply teacher agencies last year according to the National Union of Teachers
- £250,000. How much the proposed new College of Teaching is looking to source from teachers to help kick start the new College
- £65,000. The figure that the government's latest advertising campaign claims *'leading practitioners'* (teachers) can earn, which many dispute

What to look out for next week

- NYA Youth Work week (all week)
- Politics in Education Summit (Monday)
- Nicky Morgan keynote speech on 'Educational Excellence' at Policy Exchange (Tuesday)
- Education Bill at Committee Stage of House of Lords (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on the role of Regional Schools Commissioners (Wed)
- Student rally in London against fees and cuts (Wednesday)