

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 4 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 following the 2015 election.)

The week summed up

Two announcements, a big push on maths and a wave of concerns about impending shortages of teachers and school places; welcome to another education year.

The two announcements first. One was the Prime Minister's 'we will not waver' pledge as he announced 18 new Free Schools as part of his government's commitment to open 500 over the lifetime of this Parliament. Over 250 are already open and a further 50+ will join them this term and although the government considers them among other things as helping meet the demand for school places, they remain controversial. As the Prime Minister indicated in his comment piece last month, the government sees reform of the school system as one of its top priorities and if the tone of this latest announcement is anything to go by, it won't 'waver' from this, criticisms or no.

The other announcement was more of a reminder from the DfE of the new Core Maths qualifications starting this month. More practical in nature and aimed at 16+ year olds with a grade C in maths, these new qualifications which have been trialled for some time and carry the same UCAS points as an AS, are intended to help encourage more young people to continue with maths in some form beyond GCSE. Only a fifth of young people at present do this and we have one of the poorest track records in this area of any OECD country, something the government is keen to tackle, although as the Association of Colleges and others have pointed out, whether we have enough trained maths teachers to teach the growing numbers is another matter.

Maths in fact has been very much in the news this week with the new GCSE maths also debuting, the government considering an extension of the Chinese style maths teaching programme, Scotland launching two new maths support groups, Carol Vorderman launching her 30-day maths online challenge, the charity National Numeracy hosting a 'Week of Inspirational Maths' and as indicated below, others pitching in with their own resources such as maths walks for schools and training resources for teachers in colleges. Just over 69% of entries gained a C grade or better in maths GCSE this year, up slightly on last year, but if my maths is correct still, it still leaves just over 30% without the standard level.

Finally shortages of teachers and of school places, an impending storm according to a Guardian headline last weekend (*"Teacher shortages and rising pupil numbers put schools on edge of crisis"*) and one which has gathered momentum as the new education year has started. It's perhaps no surprise that the National Audit Office has announced it'll investigate initial teacher training while the title of the latest London Councils report on school places, *'Do the Maths,'* not only sticks with the maths theme but pretty much says it all.

Top headlines this week

- 'Get out of your comfort zone state school leaders are told.' (**Monday**)
- 'Shortage of teachers set to spark new schools crisis.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Cameron launches wave of free schools.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Sixth formers to be offered courses in real life maths.' (**Thursday**)
- 'DfE starts overseas recruitment drive to combat teacher shortage.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who promised to deliver two waves of new schools every year (March and Sept) from now to 2020 as he announced the first wave of **new Free Schools** under the current Parliament
- The Business Secretary who pledged to introduce tougher sanctions for employers if they don't pay the **National Living Wage** when it's introduced next April
- Nichola Sturgeon who prioritised education along with a return to standardised assessments at the end of primary and beginning of secondary education as she set out a new **Programme for Government** in Scotland
- The think tank IPPR who called for 16-19 provision and science to be protected as it considered some of the options facing the Chancellor in his forthcoming **Spending Review**
- Professor Sir David Greenaway, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nottingham who has succeeded Sir David Eastwood as **Chair of the Russell Group**
- Professor Hugh Brady who has succeeded Sir Eric Thomas as Vice-Chancellor and President at **Bristol University**
- The **Office of the Independent Adjudicator** (OIA,) the HE students' Ombudsman, whose remit from this month has been extended to cover HE courses in FE, Sixth Form Colleges and other recognised settings
- Universities UK who published its latest (2013-2014) useful smorgasbord of **facts and figures about UKHE** with the increasing diversity of the sector one of the key messages
- The HE Policy Institute who published a **report** comparing the German university system (which has scrapped tuition fees) with that in England
- Middlesex University who will be rolling out its unique **free course book scheme** whereby students are able to download one free e-book per module over the duration of their course
- The British Chambers of Commerce who is launching a new **'Your Future'** careers programme with help from the Skills Funding Agency to help young people connect with employers
- The car manufacturer **Aston Martin** who may be about to make many young people's dreams come true as it announces plans to recruit ten new apprenticeships
- Ofsted who opened the doors with the publication of its **complaints procedure** and updated **senior management structure**
- The Education and Training Foundation who are launching their 'training' modules with schemes of work and resources to help teachers deliver **GCSE English and maths resits**
- **Core Maths**, a post-16 practical option for those who already have a C in GCSE maths and who may need to keep their maths skills up, which comes in from this Sept. (Sample question: *'Sam invests £1,000 in a savings account. The compound interest is fixed at 4% each year. How many years will it take for the value of the investment to exceed £2,000?'* Answer at bottom of this section)
- Former government adviser Robert Hill whose latest blog highlights the rise in the number of **multi-academy trusts**
- Natasha Devon, the DfE's first ever **mental health champion for schools** who will call for a 'Five a Day' of peace and meditation as part of her new programme for schools
- John Dunford who reflected on his two years as **National Pupil Premium Champion** now that the role has closed and who highlighted 12 areas of good practice that he'd collected on the way

- Kim Knappett, a secondary science teacher in London, this year's President of the **Association of Teachers and Lecturers** (ATL)
- Teacher workloads and school funding, highlighted as the top two concerns in the NASUWT top ten list of **teacher priorities** as the new term begins
- Newcastle University Teaching Fellow Steve Humble who explained how **'maths walks'** (taking groups out to apply maths) can help overcome some of the stigma about maths
- The Guardian Teacher Network whose latest 'How to teach' article covered **'How to teach coding and programming'** in primary and secondary school
- Better YCT, the new app launched by the UCL Institute of Education to help **teach Mandarin** to primary school pupils
- Mobile phones, the subject of further debate this week about their use in schools with Sir Michael Wilshaw saying 'ban them,' Tom Bennett saying 'they should be kept in their holsters until really necessary' but the head of a leading school arguing that 'they can't disinvested so we should find ways to control them'
- Henry VIII who emerged as the worst monarch in history in a **poll** conducted by the Historical Writers Association followed in order by Edward VIII, Kings John and Charles I
- *"On your way into school on the first day you spot a colleague? Do you hide, rush over, wave or engage in group moan?"* One of a number of questions in **The Guardian's** 'Back to school' teacher quiz
- *(Answer to the Core Maths question: 18 years)*

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Too much academic networking revolves around football and drink:"* <http://owl.li/RuBQs>
- *"@britishchambers: 'When it comes to apprenticeships, employers are crying out for quality, not quantity.'"* <http://ow.ly/REsms>
- *"Watching just an hour of TV can ruin teenagers' GCSE results."* <http://ind.pn/1hFe3YH>
- *"Exams put pressure on children – that is their virtue."* @barnabylenon
- *"Secondary school is less scary than we thought, teenagers say* bit.ly/1igFRDI
- *"The essay is a 1,000-word bore. Discuss."* <http://owl.li/RJDKW>

Quote(s) of the week

- *"The weather may have been a washout this month but the sun has certainly been shining on the British economy."* The CBI in its latest economic survey
- *"At present 3 children per average classroom has a diagnosable mental health problem with many more struggling with undiagnosed conditions such as anxiety."* The DfE's new champion for children's mental health on the importance of the task facing her
- *"In today's world of comparable outcomes, performance relative to other schools is arguably more important than absolute performance."* Education Datalab reflects on its trials in measuring progress in English and maths in Year 7
- *"Having given up fags a few years ago, I can confidently say smart phones are addictive and if we care about children at all, we should help create spaces for them where they aren't allowed to chew on the thin black plastic teat of their iphones every heartbeat."* Behaviour 'expert' Tom Bennett on the lure of smart phones

- *“Assessment is a rickety vehicle driven too quickly over the wrong ground.”* NAHT general secretary Russell Hobby on concerns about assessment at the start of a new year

Number(s) of the week

- 2m. The number of adults studying and training in colleges according to AoC figures
- 8.4m. The number of students in schools, both public and private, in England who will be heading back to school this week and next
- Just under 45%. The number of Free Schools opened in deprived communities according to data from **Full Fact**
- 6. The number of new FE colleges approved to offer provision for 14-16 yr olds from this year
- 25%. The number of parents who, according to research commissioned by Santander, are prepared to move house to ensure a place at a ‘good’ school
- £23 an hour. The average cost of a private tutor as a survey by the Sutton Trust reveals more and more parents are turning to them
- 45%. The number of young people targeted daily by bullies according to research from the Diana Award charity

What to look out for next week

- The 3rd annual **ResearchEd National Conference** with a galaxy of speakers (this Saturday, Sept 5 all day)
- Parliament returns (Monday)
- Education Committee witness session with the Education Secretary (Wednesday)
- New Labour leader announced (Saturday)
- **National Numeracy** in conjunction with Stanford University hosts a ‘Week of Inspirational Maths,’ with lesson plans and resources at KS2/3 for participating schools (Monday-Friday)
- And coming up: Pearson and the London Knowledge Lab are offering three high profile events with leading thinkers examining how smarter digital tools can improve learning. The first event will be hosted in London on 22 Sept with follow-up events on 15 Oct and 17 Nov. Details and booking [here](#)