

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 5 June 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 one of the busiest weeks in the education year so far with exam halls (and students) at full stretch, a series of reports and updates released, the new Education Bill published and to top it all off, some cuts or 'in-year departmental savings' including for education, announced. The new mantra coming out of government at the moment is *"the sooner you start, the smoother the ride."* The Chancellor's used the phrase twice now in as many speeches and ended his speech with it again yesterday. The aim of course is to demonstrate intent and seize leadership of key areas when other parties are resolving their own issues and will set the tone for much of this year. The Prime Minister's announcement earlier in the week of ten new implementation taskforces to keep things on track in areas like apprenticeships and childcare offer further proof of this.

The two big education policy issues at the moment are the cuts and the Bill.

The cuts were announced in the economic debate yesterday and follow a report from the OECD earlier in the week urging the Chancellor to limit the pain so as to avoid harming growth. The savings, as the Chancellor prefers to call them, affect both DfE and BIS, each of which will contribute £450m to the £3bn of savings listed, arguably from what the DfE called *"underspends, efficiencies and small budgetary reductions."* Exactly where axes will fall is not clear yet but non-essential activity, some agency activity and non-protected areas like 16-19, adult learning and HE look most vulnerable and will be biting their nails even further as the July Budget approaches.

As for the Education Bill which was laid this week and will be subject to further consultation on some of the detail later this summer, debate has continued all week about proposals which grant the Education Secretary new powers over the intervention and conversion (to academy status) of so-called 'coasting' schools. The **TES** and **Schools Week** both have useful summaries of the Bill and an accompanying Policy Watch briefly outlines some of the issues which broadly come down to the question of whether academisation really is a silver bullet, what impact such centralisation of powers will have on schools in general and heads in particular and whether this more forceful approach is the best way of raising standards.

Some important reports were also published this week. Stand-outs include Ofqual's latest 'Perceptions' survey which found confidence in core qualifications remaining pretty high but some concerns about the pace and nature of change. Also two annual surveys in HE, one from OFFA on how universities are meeting their access agreements (90% have been met) and one from HEPI/HEA on the student academic experience (87% positive.) All details below

Top headlines this week

- 'The surprising success of Britain's university spin-outs.' (**Monday**)
- 'Teachers need respect, world leaders insist.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'All failing schools to be Academies under Education Bill.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Too many disadvantaged university students dropping out despite rise in acceptance rates, says watchdog head.' (**Thursday**)
- 'George Osborne announces fresh cuts to education budgets.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The **Education Bill**, **Childcare Bill** and the **Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill**, three of the education-related Bills which have all now been published
- The Prime Minister who announced a number of new **taskforces** to help ensure manifesto policy commitments in key areas such as youth employment and childcare are delivered to schedule
- The Chancellor who **announced** £4.5bn of spending cuts from current budgets with £3bn of that coming from dept savings including both DfE and BIS
- The Chancellor who headed to the Midlands early in the week to **outline** ways in which the region could become Britain's engine for growth
- The DfE and BIS Depts who completed the lists of ministerial responsibilities
- The DfE who have promised to conduct a **review** of childcare funding and provision before the summer to help ensure the new childcare commitment could be implemented a year earlier than planned
- New Minister for Universities Jo Johnson who used a maiden **speech** to the 2015 Going Global Conference to back more international students coming to the UK to study
- Graduate Prospects who have been appointed by the HE Minister to help ensure websites and providers provide genuine information and services to international students
- HEPI and HEA's latest **survey** of students' academic experience which found 87% of students surveyed fairly or very satisfied but many concerned about how their money was being spent, about contact time and their future prospects
- The Office for Fair Access whose latest annual **report** on university access agreements showed that although the actual amount spent on financial support had dropped, the total money spent on widening participation had increased and 90% of targets had been met
- Former Education Secretary David Blunkett who is to become chair of Global University Systems' newly acquired University of Law
- The British Council who commissioned a **survey** of which degree courses the world's most successful people take and found that while just over half had taken a social sciences or humanities degree, no one particular subject stood out
- The CIPD who published a **report** on how young people are supported and developed in the workplace and found an increasing number of organisations now offering programmes aimed at 16-24 yr olds alongside the more established graduate programmes
- The Guardian who invited six leading education 'experts' to define the term **coasting** and ended up with a range of interpretations
- Chief Regulator Glenys Stacey who **wrote** to secondary schools to explain a bit more about how the national reference test is intended to operate when it comes in from March 2017
- Ofqual who published its latest **annual survey** on views about particular qualifications and found that while confidence in traditional qualifications among the public and profession was still high, concerns remained about some aspects of the current reforms such as GCSE grading and de-coupled AS levels
- Ofqual who published a little digital **postcard** to help explain the new GCSE grading system
- Ofqual who invited comments on the prototype for its new look **register** of regulated qualifications and reported back on GCSE spoken language **assessment arrangements**

- The Sutton Trust who published a **report** into why so many pupils who do well at age 11 fail to translate this into success at GCSE and concluded that dedicated school monitoring and a new fund was needed to support what they called this 'missing talent'
- Character education, the subject of a new **report** from the think tank Demos and Birmingham University's Jubilee Centre which called for it to be embedded in schools' curricula and given a specific focus in Ofsted inspections
- The Arts Council who have helped set up a new **scheme** for creative writing in schools starting this October
- *Phenomenon*, *unnecessary* and *disappearance*, three of the words in KS2 spelling tests that adults found most difficult to spell in a recent survey

Tweet(s) of the week

- "Teachers being asked to be Einstein, Mother Teresa and Tony Soprano rolled into one." @tes
- "Nicky Morgan: Heads should not fear for their jobs." @tes
- "Johnson: no cap on international students and no intention to introduce one. Ambition is to grow." @JMorganTHE
- "The most pressing education battles of the next 5 years seem all to concern capacity." @russellhobby

Quote(s) of the week

- "I will launch an 'Inspiring the future' project, bringing together businesses, voluntary and community activists and union members to encourage them to go into state schools and show how education can transform children's lives." Labour leadership contender Liz Kendall on helping raise the value of education
- "Driving the roll-out of universal broadband and better mobile phone connections, to ensure everyone is part of the digital economy." The terms of reference for the new Digital infrastructure and inclusion taskforce
- "One of my regrets in my time as Minister is in not funding students to go abroad." Former HE Minister reflects on failures to extend the fee loan system to studying abroad
- "The tanker seems to be turning." Les Ebdon, director of the Office for Fair Access commenting on the latest stats that point to more students from disadvantaged backgrounds going to top universities
- "It's one of those terms that makes much more sense politically than educationally." Professor Michael Jopling on the term 'coasting,' as in 'coasting school'
- "And we're going to expand the fantastic Birmingham Bacc so that even more pupils get the chance to work on projects designed by local businesses." The Chancellor of the Exchequer praises the local Bacc in helping raise skill levels for young people on a visit to the Midlands

Number(s) of the week

- £450m. The cuts announced for each of the DfE and BIS in the Chancellor's latest announcement
- 10 and 14. The number of new Implementation Taskforces and Cabinet Committees now confirmed

- 58%. The proportion of employers, in a survey by Universum, who rated work experience as more valuable in graduate recruitment than a specific grade from a specific university
- £628m. The amount of money spent by universities on widening participation in 2013-14, up £64 on the previous year according to the latest figures from OFFA
- 12 hours a week. Average taught contact time for HE students reported in HEPI/HEA's latest survey
- 54%. The percentage of parents in Ofqual's latest survey yet to get to grips with the new GCSE grading scale
- 300. The number of secondary schools each year who will be asked to take part in the national reference test intended to support awarding in English and maths GCSE
- 600,000. The number of families expected to benefit from the new free childcare arrangements

What to look out for next week

- National Bookstart Week
- Universities UK Conference on 'Enhancing the International Student Experience' (Tuesday)
- VQ (Vocational Qualifications) debate in Parliament (Tuesday)
- VQ Day (Wednesday)
- Nick Gibb speech at Policy Exchange (Thursday)
- National Education ICT Conference (Thursday)