

2015/5

29 May 2015

Policy Tracker - Keeping track of what happened in the world of education in May 2015

Main talking points

The month may have brought an unanticipated general election result but its been pretty much business as usual ever since, especially for the world of education where familiar faces returned to their Ministerial desks ready to start work on implementing some of the 38 education-related manifesto commitments. For schools, where Nicky Morgan was quickly out of the stalls promising to tackle so-called 'coasting' and struggling schools, the new Education Bill has enshrined new intervention and academy conversion powers but left open the question of just what a 'coasting' school is. Either way, the issue of school performance is set to run through the rest of this year. For FE, who will have more than one eye on the forthcoming Summer Budget, its ability to deliver required training volumes particularly for the young and low-skilled who have been the subject of a couple of fairly bleak OECD reports this month, will remain under scrutiny. As for HE, where there was little new either in the Conservative manifesto or the Queen's Speech, the challenge of creating a high-level technical route remains as does the visa issue as the recent Immigration Bill indicates

Key headlines from the month

- Early Years. The Pre-School Alliance sets out a post-election manifesto plan
- Children. The Children's Commissioner publishes a 7-point vision for the new government
- Reading. Latest National Literacy Trust survey finds more children reading for pleasure
- 49%. The no of MPs who had a comprehensive education according to the Sutton Trust
- Arts subjects. 2 Organisations join forces to call for greater opportunities in the school curriculum
- EAL. The Education Endowment Foundation invites bids to undertake more research
- GCSE maths. Sample assessment materials to be amended following Ofqual research
- A level subject take-up. Ofsted reveals the gender differences
- 'Coasting' schools. The government targets them as others try and define them
- Regional School Commissioners. Education Bill proposes new intervention powers
- Free schools. Next round of applications opens
- College of Teaching. New survey suggests 80% of teachers would support
- Teacher recruitment. Concerns grow as recruitment pipeline slows
- Careers. Government turns to Jobcentre Plus advisers for extra help
- Apprenticeships. AoC blog looks at ways of meeting the government's 3m challenge
- Apprenticeship numbers. Statutory annual reporting on progress to be made
- FE inspections. Ofsted confirms it'll scrap graded lesson observations from Sept
- FE impact. 157 Group report suggests av impact of a college on its community can be £550m
- FE staff (1). UCU survey highlights increasing levels of workforce stress
- FE staff (2.) The Education and Training Foundation launches new professional body
- HE. Universities UK builds up its campaign for the UK to stay in the EU
- Devo max. Core Cities and LGA publish proposals for further local devolution
- Local Gov Devolution Bill. Government proposes new legislative framework

Reports/Publications of the month (in order of publication)

- **Improving Schools in Sweden.** The OECD assesses what changes are needed to help the country regain its former educational glory
- **Universal Basic Skills.** Another hefty OECD report this time highlighting the importance of basic skills for young people where the UK ranks 20th in the OECD ranking of 76 countries
- **The new digital learning age.** The RSA examines the role of technology in learning and highlights some ways in which its potential could be unleashed
- **Technology, Distraction and Student Performance.** The Centre for Economic Performance examines the impact of mobile phones in schools and concludes they can be a hindrance
- **London Calling.** Business firm London First and PWC crunch the numbers and calculate that international students bring a net benefit of £2.8bn a year to UK GDP
- **The accounting and budgeting of student loans.** A new pamphlet for the HE Policy Institute delves into the impact of current loan repayment arrangements on future policy making
- **English Devolution.** The Local Government Association makes the case for wider devolution of responsibilities ahead of the Cities Devolution Bill

- **GCSE maths.** Ofqual publishes the full research report and subsequent required actions following its investigation into assessment standards in GCSE maths
- **Summer Exam Entries.** The latest stats from Ofqual on exam entries for summer 2015 show a drop in GCSE and AS entries but an increase for L1/2 Certificates and A levels
- **OECD Skills outlook 2015 on Youth, Skills and Employability.** The OECD builds on its 2013 adult skills survey and finds a depressing scene for many young people especially the low-skilled
- **The economic impact of FE colleges.** The 157 Group and economic modelling experts EMSI point to the positive economic benefits of colleges on learners, communities and the taxpayer
- **Grade point average (GPA.)** The HE Academy reports on its 2-year pilot project to develop a more finessed honours degree classification system based around a GPA scale

Speeches of the month

- The Prime Minister's 8 May election victory **speech** sets out the principles for the new majority Tory administration including better schools and more apprenticeships
- George Osborne's 14 May Northern Powerhouse **speech** outlines government plans to encourage local councils and LEAs to take a lead in planning local skills training and other functions
- Sajid Javid's 19 May Business enterprise **speech** confirms a number of measures to support small businesses and enterprise as part of a new Enterprise Bill
- George Osborne's 20 May CBI **speech** highlights deficit reduction, a re-balanced economy and increased productivity as the three pillars of the government's economic plan
- The Prime Minister's 21 May immigration **speech** includes calls for more training of the indigenous population and continued curbs on cases of visa abuse
- The Queen's **Speech** of 27 May lists 26 prospective Bills for the forthcoming Parliament with at least six of particular interest to the world of education

Quotes of the month

- *"We can make Britain a place where a good life is in reach for everyone who is willing to work and do the right thing."* The PM promises the good life on his return to Downing street
- *"Just good enough is no longer good enough."* The Education Secretary outlines the case against mediocrity in schools
- *"A coasting definition will set be set out in due course according to a number of factors."* The new Education and Adoption Bill says a definition is coming
- *"My budget is shrinking."* A head writes an open letter to the Ed Secretary as she returns to her desk
- *There are only two things that parents can ever say to teenagers taking their exams. The wrong thing. And the wrong thing.* Pressure builds as another exam season looms
- *"GCSE and A levels are like an egg timer squeezing a wealth of experience and learning through a narrow bottleneck of testing."* The departing head of Eton on the modern exam factory
- *"The results suggest that low-achieving students are more likely to be distracted by the presence of mobile phones while high achievers can focus regardless."* Latest on the mobile phone debate

Word or phrase of the month

- 'One Nation.' What the government says it's aiming to create over the next five years

Steve Besley

Head of Policy @SteveBesley