

Policy Eye: (Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 17 October 2014

(Welcome to Policy Eye, a new nearly weekly additional service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days and introduced to keep a special 'eye' on developments in the build up to the 2015 election.)

The week in a word

It didn't take long. MPs only returned to Westminster this week and already the issue of school reform has become a talking point. The Prime Minister has revealed that further measures to tackle school performance will be included in his Party's Manifesto next year, the Deputy Prime Minister pledged further support for reducing teacher workloads while the Shadow Education Minister joined the long list of other enthusiasts of the Singaporean system. This all comes as a fresh batch of stats hit the education and training system, some good, some not so good, some not sure yet until they come out next week but all likely to provoke further debate on system performance. The good news first. Unemployment in the latest quarterly figures released this week, took another sharp dip including importantly that for 16-24 year olds which was down a further 1.7%; pupil absence rates decreased and Key Stage 1 and Early Years Foundation Stage 'results' improved. On the not so good news front, the latest data on the FE and skills sector, released this week but covering the 2013/14 year indicated a drop in both apprenticeship starts and English and maths participation. As for the impending figures, these come next week with the first sighting of official figures on exam results this year and suspicions are growing that in some areas, they will show a noticeable drop in the numbers achieving the 5 A*-C mark. The finger is being pointed at the Government's changes to the exam system such as the changing of the rules on early entry and league table equivalencies but the reality as schools know to their cost, is that the buck stops with them.

Top headlines this week

- 'Cameron plans rapid intervention for failing schools.' (**Monday**)
- 'University PGCE courses braced for big cuts.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Parental opinion holds sway over university choice.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Career advice brings better grades.' (**Thursday**)
- 'AoC demands 'once in a generation' review.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- David Cameron who announced that new powers for Regional School Commissioners to be able to intervene in under performing schools along with the creation of a new elite corps of teachers ready to 'fly into' schools that need help would be included in the Party's 2015 Manifesto
- Graham Stuart, the Chair of the Education Committee, who took the Education Secretary to task over Academy School inspections
- Vince Cable who spent the week in India trying among other things to assure Indian students that UK universities would welcome them

- Nick Clegg who in an opinion piece in the TES heaped further praise on teachers and confirmed his Party's intention to reduce teacher workloads
- Matthew Hancock who helped launch 'See Inside Manufacturing' month with a keynote speech on the Government's Industrial Strategy
- Ofqual who confirmed that changes to accreditation requirements for academic and vocational qualifications will take effect from Nov 3rd 2014
- Ofsted who reported that they still had some concerns about how far change was happening in the 'Trojan Schools' in Birmingham
- HEFCE who called for initial thoughts on Government proposals to internationalise the research assessment process
- The Association of Colleges who published some interesting stats on how many businesses on average each colleges works with/provides training for (597 apparently)
- The Edge Foundation who marked their 10th birthday with a survey revealing strong parental support for vocational learning
- The body advising the Government on A level subject content changes who expressed their concerns about the impact of uncoupling the AS on key subjects such as maths
- The Sutton Trust whose commissioned report provided the latest evidence that the current careers guidance system is failing to deliver
- Primary Futures, the programme designed to raise awareness about jobs and working life for primary school children, which held a week of talks and visits by local volunteers
- Year 1 pupils 74% of whom met the expected standard in phonics this year, up 5% on the previous year
- The main TV channels who announced plans for the Party Leaders' TV debates next April
- The Economist magazine who looked at which countries people prefer to work in when they work abroad and found the US as the favoured destination followed by Britain and Canada
- Unemployment figures, down to just under 2m for the period up to August 2014 making it one of the largest annual falls in unemployment on record
- Four universities who have got together with the BBC to launch a series of MOOCs on different aspects of the First World War
- The University of Oxford which marked the deadline day for Oxbridge applications this year by releasing a sample of questions used as part of the interview process (Sample question for History: how much of the past can you count?)

Tweet of the week

- *"A liberal education is one of the best ways of smoothing the rougher edges of masculine instincts."* @Ed_Dorrell

Quote of the week

- *"Teaching isn't a job for the faint hearted."* Nick Clegg

Number(s) of the week

- 1,500. The number of 'top' teachers the Prime Minister wants to see signed up by 2020 and assigned to help underperforming schools
- 10. The number of times the FE skills system has been shunted between different Government Depts over the last 30 years according to a City and Guilds Report
- 1.97m. The latest unemployment total

What to look out for next week

- Science and Technology Committee witness session with Greg Clark (Monday)
- Education Committee witness session on PSHE (Tuesday)
- Final Education Committee witness Session on Academies and Free Schools (Wed)