

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 12 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

Teaching and learning have been very much at the forefront this week. The Schools Minister made a keynote speech on the importance of the core academic curriculum, MPs debated vocational qualifications, Ofqual continued with its flow of information on the reformed GCSEs and A' levels, the Education and Endowment Foundation published its latest batch of project reports on innovative approaches to assessment and the Teacher Development Trust launched a major new report on 'Developing Great Teaching.'

For many, this is a welcome shift away from the often distracting obsession with school structures and systems and a focus on what really matters, namely high-quality teaching and learning. As former Schools Minister Jim Knight put it at the launch of the Teacher Development Trust Report this week; *"I wish we didn't have the role of schools minister in this country. We spend way too much time obsessing about schools-their structures, their schools, their accountability, their buildings. Instead we should have a teaching minister."* Maybe. But there's a further interesting development to note as well and that is the extent to which the teaching profession is now taking a lead role in some of these developments. The College for Teaching, the Foundation for Leadership in Education and the Institution for FE, all of which have also been in the news this week, are all teacher led while the mantra 'Own your Curriculum' is beginning to gain momentum.

We shall no doubt hear more next week when Professor John Hattie's latest Papers are released under the Pearson 'Open Ideas' series and the Sunday Times hosts its annual two day education-fest at Wellington College.

For the moment, it's worth just noting some of the messages that came out of this week's burst of activity. On the move to strengthen the position of the core academic curriculum, Nick Gibb in his speech to the think tank Policy Exchange last night, made a strong case for this being part of a moral mission, ensuring that disadvantaged pupils were given the same opportunities to secure the same high-value qualifications as everyone else. Further details on the mechanics such as whether all pupils will have to follow the requirements are due shortly. On vocational qualifications, Nick Boles, the Skills Minister, posed three questions which seem to encapsulate where government thinking is at present; none new but all important: should they start at age 14 or 16; should colleges specialise more; have we got the right qualifications? As for 'Developing Great Teaching,' where considerable evidence of effective professional development for teachers in other countries was presented, it's very much a case of sustained support rather than occasional drip feed that we should be aiming for. Bye-bye Baker days perhaps

Top headlines this week

- 'Leading girls' school to scrap homework over stress fears.' (**Monday**)
- 'QAA reviews could be abolished.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Crack down on fake universities launched in England.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Traditional GCSE subjects for all pupils.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Teach First warns recruitment crisis is worse than 2002.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Schools Minister Nick Gibb who set out **government plans** to strengthen provision of a core academic curriculum in schools with further consideration of some of the details to come
- MPs who discussed some of the perennial issues surrounding vocational qualifications including status, funding and take-up in a **debate** on the eve of national VQ Day
- BIS whose latest quarterly **stats** on graduate employment suggested that the unemployment rate for young grads is at its lowest for 8 years despite the fact that a **survey** from the NUS found students pretty pessimistic about their future job prospects
- The **Migration Advisory Committee** who have been asked to advise the government before the end of the year on how to restrict work visas to 'genuine' skills shortages and how to boost apprenticeship funds through a new skills levy on Tier 2 visas raising concerns among some employers
- Labour Education spokesman Tristram Hunt who **reflected** on Labour's election defeat and suggested that when it came to education, 'muddled priorities' were largely to blame
- Universities UK who published their latest (2011/12 based) **assessment** of how much UK universities contribute to the UK economy
- The founder of the Wonkhe website who posted a useful **blog** on how the debate on proposed changes to quality assurance arrangements in higher education is shaping up
- The University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC) who issued a **call** for good case study examples of HEI involvement in Higher Apprenticeships and Degree Apprenticeships
- The Edge Foundation, the 'hosts' of this year's VQ Day, who published a **survey** of the skills most valued by neighbours and found that having a plumber, an electrician or a doctor living next door came high up the list
- The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) who ahead of next month's budget **published** a set of four proposals for helping improve the skills system
- The NFER who produced a literature **report** for the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCGQ) on the value of vocational qualifications offered in the UK to learners, business and the economy
- Training providers many of whom have been concerned to receive letters from the Skills Funding Agency telling them that **growth funding**, the funding they can apply for when they deliver more than allocated, will be frozen until after the July Budget
- The UK Commission for Employment and Skills whose latest sector 'special' **report** looked at the digital and creative sector which they calculated was going to need 1.2m new workers by 2020
- Eduserve who published the results of a **report** into digital learning resources in FE and identified three current barriers: insufficient funding; ineffective procurement; low levels of staff engagement in new technologies
- The **Institution for FE** which was granted its Royal Charter this week
- 7 bodies, including the AoC, ASCL and Sixth Form Colleges Association, who got together to pen **letters** to the Chancellor and Education Secretary highlighting 16-19 funding concerns
- The Local Government Association (LGA) who published the results of a **survey** into how local councils were supporting 16-19 participation and found that 91% have had to reduce expenditure in this area since 2010 and 54% have outsourced provision
- A new national funding formula for schools which according to the **TES** may see developments later this year and which has already generated **strong feelings**

- The TES who produced a useful **set of charts** from the recent DfE school census data on rising pupil numbers
- Ofsted who in its latest **Annual Report and Accounts** suggested that new inspection arrangements would be able to generate annual savings of around £6.5m from 2016/17
- Ofqual who launched a **consultation** on new rules and guidance for assessing practical skills in AS and A level sciences
- The 'Claim your College' group behind the College for Teaching who have produced a new awareness pack to be used in promoting awareness of the College
- Three organisations, the ASCL, NAHT and National Governors' Association, who are getting together to develop qualifications and training for school leaders under a new **Foundation for Leadership in Education**
- The Teacher Development Trust who along with TES Global launched a **report** on best practice in teacher professional development which recommended a shift away from the traditional one-off events to more sustained, supportive events matching current needs
- Chris Riddell who will take over from Malorie Blackman as children's laureate
- 'Invictus' by W.E.Henley and 'It's Work' by Benjamin Zephaniah chosen by teenagers as the top pre-1914 and post-1914 poems respectively in this year's Poetry by Heart competition

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"I once had an inspector tell me children were bored in lessons. Evidence? One looked out of the window." @tombennett71*
- *"GPA degree classifications are coming but will getting a 4.25 ever match up to a 1st?" @timeshighered*
- *"Be more like Aldi, boarding schools told." @schools_ontap*
- *"Two nominees for Public Accounts Committee chair mention need to scrutinise schools sector. Could be interesting." @warwickmansell*
- *"Social media turned exam angst into a different kind of event this summer with its own instant commentary and millions reading stories." @seanjcoughlan*

Acronym(s) of the Week

- TNE. Transnational education, typically students who start their degrees abroad on courses run or recognised by UK universities and the subject of a research **report** from HEFCE this week.

Quote(s) of the week

- *"We don't export enough; we don't train enough; we don't save enough; we don't invest enough; we don't manufacture enough; we certainly don't build enough; and far too much of the economic activity of the nation is concentrated in the centre of London." The Chancellor's 'don't get me started' list of current productivity challenges*
- *"We have just done one of the biggest data studies undertaken by government, matching people's education performance and their earnings as recorded by HMRC." The Skills Minister highlights the importance of qualifications that can improve people's job prospects and earnings potential as he rounds off the debate on Voc Quals Day*
- *"To those who criticise our focus on academic subjects or suggest the EBacc is a Gradindian anachronism, I have a simple question: would you want your child to be denied*

the opportunity to study a science, history or geography or a foreign language?" The Schools Minister challenges critics of the government's focus on core academic subjects

- *"In a decade's time, if we have still got GCSEs in England, Britain will be completely out of kilter with other European countries and not giving young people what they need."* Labour's Shadow Education Minister remains committed to an overhaul of 14-19 education
- *"We are urging you to address the growing and significant funding disparity in the funding for the education of 16-19 yr olds in schools and colleges."* Leading organisations write to the Chancellor urging him to review 16-19 funding provision
- *"I've never worked in a profession before or since my time in the classroom in which people talked about 'getting out' the way a seasoned prisoner might discuss making a run for it."* A correspondent in The Daily Telegraph muses over how many teachers still hanker after an escape route

Number(s) of the week

- 9. The age at which children apparently stop wanting to be firemen and women or nurses and want to become TV reality stars
- 94,000. The number of extra pupils in primary schools in England this year, up 2.1%, according to the latest School Census figures
- 41%. The number of adults who have undertaken some form of learning over the last three years, up 3% (although not for the unemployed) in NIACE's latest participation survey
- £39.9bn. How much UK Universities contributed to UK GDP in 2011 in the latest set of figures released by UUK
- £143.3m. Ofsted's budget for 2015/16 according to its latest Annual Report and Accounts
- 8. The number of factors that make for effective teacher CPD as identified by the Teacher Development Trust and TES Global in a report launched this week

What to look out for next week

- Adult Learners' Week (all week)
- MPs Questions to the DfE (Monday)
- Launch of two new 'thought piece' papers by Professor John Hattie under the Pearson 'Open Ideas' series on what works/what doesn't in education (Tuesday)
- Chairs of Parliamentary Select Committees selected (Wednesday)
- Sunday Times Festival of Education (Thursday/Friday)
- UVAC/Edge Seminar on the 'Future for high level voc ed in England' (Friday)