

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 13 Nov 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.)

The week summed up

Last Friday's hefty higher education Green Paper has continued to attract comment for much of this week but the real elephant in the room and looming larger all the time is the Chancellor's impending Autumn Statement now just over a week away and where things have ratcheted up this week.

This year's Statement is particularly pertinent for three reasons. First because it will lay out the government's public spending plans, an eye-watering £4 trillion for the next three years, and thus effectively set the tone for much of the rest of this Parliament. Second, because as the Social Market Foundation's Chief Economist Nida Broughton put it in an excellent [guide](#) to the whole thing, the Chancellor's attempting a very difficult balancing act, that of eliminating borrowing and running a surplus by 2019/20 and that could have implications for us all. And third, because, particularly for those of us in education, the omens in the build-up to the Review have been as scary as Macbeth's witches. The latest incarnation of this followed a commissioned piece of analysis published by the Labour Party this week into post-16 education suggesting it was *"on a cliff edge."* The government has been quick to dismiss claims that a number of sixth form and FE colleges could topple over yet it too has described the sector as being in a fragile state, hence the worries.

The official position on the Spending Review was set out by the Chancellor in a speech at the start of the week in which he set out the three guiding principles behind any decisions being made: would it increase the economic security of working people or not; would it enhance our national security or not; would it extend opportunity or not? In his own words: *"if it does, we will do it; if not we won't."* He went on to confirm that four depts had now had their spending plans approved, three more were nearly there and another three were still needing to finish their homework. The two education depts are somewhere in the middle, nearly there but not quite. Monday's Guardian had a useful summary [here](#) of the latest picture.

Away from the Spending Review manoeuvres, the CBI has been in Annual Conference this week where the soon to depart Director-General continued his pursuit of a more skills based curriculum in schools, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and SchoolDash published some interesting data on ethnic groups going to university and regional differences in GCSE performance respectively and, as indicated, debate has continued about the virtues or otherwise of the HE Green Paper. [Wonkhe's](#) *'the closer you look, the less you see,'* [Chris Husbands](#) *'five things we know and five speculations'* and [Roger King's](#) *'Explainer,'* all offer excellent and very readable summaries.

Top headlines this week

- 'The teaching challenge for Britain's universities.' (**Monday**)
- 'Cuts could close 4 in 10 colleges say Labour.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Ofsted raises alarm over squalid illegal schools.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'HE Green Paper could mean more than 1000 universities in England. (**Thursday**)
- 'Developing world beating maths teachers to take a decade.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who set out some of the economic challenges facing business and the country, including the need to raise skill levels when he **spoke** to the CBI Annual Conference this week
- The Chancellor who **confirmed** that 4 Depts had now negotiated their future spending plans with the Treasury and that a further 7 (including the two Education Depts) were still in negotiation with the Treasury as the Autumn Statement loomed just two weeks away
- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who used an **address** to the CBI Annual Conference to run through the government's education reforms and how business could help
- The Public Accounts Committee who called on the government to set clearer scrutiny and accountability arrangements as it **reported** on the early City Deals being used to help drive local growth
- The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee who completed its **Inquiry** into the annual £1.1bn Science budget by highlighting the importance of science and innovation to the economy
- The Office for National Statistics whose latest quarterly **report** on the UK labour market up to Sept 2015 reported a further increase in employment levels but a mixed picture on wages
- PWC whose latest 'Economic Outlook' **Bulletin** reported that while growth had slowed a little in the UK over the year, things remain relatively strong for the foreseeable future with all UK regions forecast to return growth of 1.6%-2.4% over the coming year
- The Institute for Government whose latest **report** on the Spending Review suggested six ways including better management and greater use of digitalisation in which the government could '*manage with less*'
- The Taxpayers Alliance who published the results of a **survey** into salary levels in state education indicating that over 7½ thousand university staff and just over a thousand school staff were paid more than £100,000 in 2013/14
- HEFCE who published its latest, slightly more cautious, **report** on the financial health of the HE sector pointing to some concerns about future projected surplus levels and about the wide variation in the financial performance of some institutions
- The Institute for Fiscal Studies who **reported** on recent BIS commissioned research which showed that white British students are now on average the least likely of all ethnic groups to go to university (32.6% compared for instance to 75.7% for those with a Chinese background)
- Steve Smith, vice-chancellor of Exeter University who argued in a **piece** in The Guardian this week that leaving the EU would have a damaging effect on UKHE research capacity
- The Hull College Group who joined the Grimsby Institute, New College Durham, Newcastle and Warwicks Colleges to become the 5th college to gain **foundation degree awarding powers**
- The Labour Party who produced commissioned **research** suggesting that as much as 40% of the college sector could be under threat if proposed spending review cuts go ahead
- Chairs of 130 FE Colleges who have **written** to the Prime Minister urging him to resist making further cuts to FE
- The Institute of Education's new Centre for Post-14 Education and Work who hosted a briefing **session** for the House of Lords on the Centre's recent report on the importance of the FE sector

- John Cridland who in a valedictory **speech** as CBI Director-General at the organisation's Annual Conference continued his call for a more balanced 'academic-vocational' school curriculum for young people
- The British Chambers of Commerce who **published** further findings from its Business and Education Survey 2015 highlighting concerns about careers provision and the preparation for work of young people
- David Laws, formerly Schools Minister under the Coalition and currently Executive Chairman at the think tank CentreForum who **announced** that the think tank had commissioned Alison Wolf to head up a review into post-18 funding and would issue a 'State of the Nation' report on English education generally in February
- Sir Michael Wilshaw who **outlined** some disturbing evidence found by inspectors at some unregistered schools and who called on the Dept to take immediate action including closing down such schools where necessary
- The Sutton Trust whose latest commissioned **research** into the impact of student background on academic attainment found that white working class boys from deprived backgrounds are nearly twice as likely to stop studying at age 16 as their peers from more advantaged backgrounds
- SchoolDash who **produced** an interesting series of maps illustrating North-South attainment gaps at GCSE
- The Advisory Committee on Maths Education (ACME) who published a **report** suggesting ways of improving initial teacher education for maths teachers including for example a recommendation that trainee primary teachers should have studied maths up to age 18
- The National Association of Writers in Education who ahead of their Conference this weekend is preparing to hand in a **petition** to Nicky Morgan calling for the Creative Writing A level not be scrapped as part of the 2017 review of subjects

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"One teacher turned author ruminates on staffroom morale: I can be happy or I can be a teacher."* @Ed_Dorrell
- *"Jo Johnson won't fix teaching, he'll just make life harder for academics."* @guardian
- *"Don't be a troll at conferences. Ask productive questions instead of terrorising your peers."* @JudyFriedberg

Quote(s) of the week

- *"We're not making savings for savings' sake: we will make savings for a purpose."* The Chancellor prepares for his Autumn Statement
- *"We are on track to reach 95% by the end of 2017."* The government on how it is rolling out superfast broadband
- *"We don't need to have a massive bureaucracy...what we need is for the heads of universities to be heads of professional learning and teaching, themselves. They need to take responsibility."* Sir Anthony Seldon on the proposed new Teaching Excellence Framework for HE
- *"At its best it's world class but too many 16 year olds every year leave school let down by the system."* John Cridland's parting words on the education system

- *"I do believe in the diversity of the system and choice for parents and I don't see why selection shouldn't be part of that choice."* Nick Timothy, Director of the New Schools Network on a more diverse school system
- *"The answer to almost every issue in the classroom is to talk to the kids about what's going on."* Nancie Atwell, Global Teacher of the Year visits London to pass on some tips

Number(s) of the week

- £4 trillion. How much the government is intending to spend in terms of public spending on areas like health, schools, defence over the lifetime of this Parliament (up from £3.6 trn over the last Parliament)
- 2.4%. The CBI's latest quarterly growth forecast for the UK (the forecast for next year is 2.6%, down from 2.8%)
- 8.5%. The predicted overall increase in full-time undergraduate student numbers over the next 3 years as indicated in HEFCE's latest overview of the sector's financial forecasts
- 3% of GDP. How much the government should spend on science and innovation according to the Commons Science and Technology Committee (nearly double the current spend)
- 7.2%. The increase in late GCSE entries this year but a 19% drop in late entries at A level according to latest Ofqual [stats](#)

What to look out for next week

- International Education Week (all week)
- Association of Colleges Annual Conference (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)
- Education Committee witness session on the role of RSCs (Tuesday)
- Skills Show (Thursday, Friday)