

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 19 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

Is 14-19 education emerging as the latest battleground in education? A glance through the week's education news headlines which even provoked one education blogger to revoke the spirit of 200 years ago by indicating that education was facing its Waterloo, suggests perhaps it is

The cause of the latest angst is the government's recent pronouncements on the EBacc, a form of core curriculum that it wants to see formally adopted by schools for new pupils from this September. *"There may be a small group of pupils for whom this won't be appropriate. But our goal is for pupils starting year 7 this September to study the EBacc subjects when they reach their GCSEs,"* so said the Education Secretary in a keynote speech at the start of the week.

The move comes, as part of the government's long-term plans to 'enshrine the excellence' that the government claims to have unlocked in some schools and spread it to all. It is partly therefore about social opportunity, opening out opportunity to all but it raises some fundamental questions.

Arguably three stand out. First, and perhaps most practically, have we got enough history, geography, language and other teachers to teach the full range of EBacc subjects? As Education Datalab have pointed out, we need a couple of thousand more language teachers for starters and yet as is widely recognised, we're facing a teacher recruitment crisis which seems likely to get worse before it gets better. Second, is a force-fed diet of the EBacc what 21st century youngsters need? The debate about balance in the curriculum, what we should teach the next generation is not new of course and many people can still point to the scars of previous skirmishes such as the emblematic Tomlinson reforms of over a decade ago, as evidence of this. If the week is anything to go by, a new reform momentum is building on those reforms with the Shadow Education Secretary calling for a cross-party review of 14-19 provision and the director general of the CBI going for equally wide-ranging reform including the scrapping of GCSEs. And third, is government best placed to determine what's most appropriate for learners? The NUT have called the idea *"poor,"* the Design and Technology Association let alone other subject groupings have complained about the downplaying of their subjects outside the EBacc while the SSAT survey of school leaders suggested, many may turn a Nelson's eye to the instruction. In other words this raises once again an issue that was bubbling around before the election about how far curriculum design should be de-politicised, left to professional experts rather than politicians to determine.

For the moment, attention will turn to the Education Bill which moves on to its second reading this week but the issue of the core curriculum will not be far away.

Top headlines this week

- 'Schools face pressure under plans to target academic GCSEs.' (**Monday**)
- 'GCSEs: Pass mark raised in exams shake-up.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Hunt wants cross-party exam consensus on 14-19 curriculum.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Schools will reject requirement to teach EBacc to all.' (**Thursday**)
- 'CBI head call for GCSEs to be scrapped.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Education Secretary who set out a number of new **measures** under the banner of raising school standards that included more formal adoption of the EBacc, setting the 'good' pass grade at GCSE at level 5 and creating a new group to help teachers deal with disruptive behaviour
- BIS and the FE Commissioner who as cuts continue to bite and colleges increasingly look at partnerships, mergers and federations as ways of reducing costs, **published** some guiding principles on how to make such arrangements work
- The government who announced that the forthcoming Enterprise Bill will include plans to protect the legal status of apprenticeships and that ensure all public bodies recruit apprentices
- Neil Carmichael, Iain Wright and Frank Field who have been selected to chair the Education, BIS and Work and Pensions Select Committees respectively as new Parliamentary business gets under way
- CBI director general John Cridland, who in a major **speech** to the Wellington Festival of Education, called on the government to conduct a major review of 14-19 learning with an emphasis on improving careers guidance, bringing back work experience and finally putting GCSEs out to grass in an effort to ensure the system provided for all rather than some
- The Social Mobility Commission whose latest **research** highlighted how difficult it can be for working-class applicants to gain entry to elite professions
- The UK Commission for employment and Skills who **reported** on the demise of the Saturday and other part-time jobs for young people and found that the pressures of studying were making it more difficult to combine work and study especially for 16/17 year olds
- The think tank Reform who as part of the build-up to this autumn's Spending Review **investigated** value for money and productivity returns in the schools sector and concluded that more autonomy, better accountability and a fairer funding system would all help
- The Office of the Independent Adjudicator, the body that deals with HE student complaints, whose latest annual **report** identified academic issues as the biggest source of complaints
- David Willetts, who in a **pamphlet** for the Policy Institute at Kings College, argued that the HE fee system should be reviewed on a regular five-year basis but equally that the current fee ceiling may need to increase although the repayment threshold should stay
- The Student Funding Panel, set up by Universities UK two years ago to look at the fee loan system, whose final **report** this week concluded that no immediate change was needed to the current system but that student living costs remained an issue
- Ian Pretty who will take over as Chief Executive of the 157 Group when Dr Lynne Sedgemore retires this Sept
- Tom Bennett, director of ResearchED, who has been asked by the Education Secretary to lead a group of practitioners in helping teachers become better at managing classroom behaviour
- Belinda Vernon who is taking over as acting Chair of National Numeracy, the charity dedicated to promoting maths/numeracy
- The Association of Colleges who **published** a set of case studies showing how colleges are working closely with employers in developing the sort of skilled workforce needed
- Tutor Voice, a new **group**, launched to support those who work in the FE sector with among other things a Bill of Rights for professional practice

- The SSAT who **surveyed** school leaders about the latest requirement on schools to provide the EBacc and found considerable concerns particularly about its application to all pupils
- Ofsted who **announced** new inspection arrangements for this Sept and which include a recognition scheme for outstanding leaders, regional scrutiny committees, more serving practitioners as inspectors, and shorter but more frequent inspections
- The OECD's Andreas Schleicher who **reported** on the emerging success of Vietnam in raising school standards and cited 3 critical factors: committed leadership; a focused curriculum; and investment in teachers
- The education commentator **Warwick Mansell** who as the new Education Bill approaches its second reading, examined how the government was likely to deal with the issue of defining a 'coasting' school
- **Regional School Commissioners** whose responsibilities will be extended from the start of next month to include sponsorship and funding of some sponsored academies
- The East Asian Maths Mastery programme, which focuses on mastering fewer topics but in greater depth and which appears to be having a positive effect according to **research** undertaken by the Institute of Education and Cambridge
- The Design and Technology Association which is preparing to launch a **campaign** to protect and promote the role of D/T in the school curriculum
- BAM Construction who will start work this autumn on preparing the Old Admiralty Building in Whitehall in readiness for the arrival of the DfE in 2017
- "What's your favourite quote?" Highlighted this week as one of the toughest questions to be asked in an interview

Tweet(s) of the week

- "Wilshaw: Ofsted has reformed, is reforming and will continue to reform." @tes
- "I know we'll never be loved but I do aim for greater respect for the inspectorate." @HarfordSean
- "Tech ed works best when it's neglected by politicians whose esteem it should never try to seek." @andrew_1910
- "Escalator from low to high skills is broken - middle skill jobs gone." John Cridland@CBItweets
- "My classroom is the most benevolent of dictatorships but it is, and shall always remain, a dictatorship." @tes

Quote(s) of the week

- "I don't want anyone to mistake stability for silence, to presume that education is no longer a priority for the government." The Education Secretary tells delegates at this week's Education Festival not to be lulled into a false sense of ease
- "I think it is a very gloomy picture." The view from one sixth-form college principal as the Sixth Form Colleges Association prepares to discuss the funding crisis facing the sector
- "Have the leaders got a grip on the institution? Do they fully understand its strengths and weaknesses?" One of the seven standard questions inspectors are likely to ask when the new inspection regime comes into effect this September

- *"Here's the special homework for the holidays that I have left to my guys for the summer."* An Italian teacher's holiday homework for his class goes viral after it includes instructions 'to watch the sunrise and walk by the sea, thinking about the things you love most'
- *"If university graduates have their moment in the sun so should people who undertake apprenticeships."* The Skills Minister on plans to protect the legal status of apprenticeships
- *"Elite firms seem to require applicants to pass a 'poshness test' to gain entry."* The Social Mobility Commission on the difficulties working-class applicants often face when they try and access top jobs
- *"Some absurdists claim that a noisy classroom that rocks with spontaneity is the perfect crucible for learning. It isn't."* The government's new behavioural expert on some of the basic rules of learning
- *"A great teacher takes a class with him. A poor robotic teacher takes them to boredom and mischief."* Piers Morgan on what makes for a good teacher

Number(s) of the week

- 139,200. The number of businesses in England who use local colleges to train their staff according to figures from the AoC
- 11,000. The number of Oxbridge graduates now teaching in UK secondary schools, a big increase over the last decade according to the Sutton Trust who carried out the research
- 84.2%. How many applicants were offered a place at their first choice secondary school this year, down 1.0%
- 7 out of 10. The number of Ofsted inspectors who will also be practitioners from this September
- 82%. The number of schools and FE providers judged good or outstanding by Ofsted in its latest official data
- 18%. The number of 16/17 year olds combining work with studying, a drop of well over 50% over the last 20 years according to research from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills

What to look out for next week

- AELP National Conference (Monday, Tuesday)
- Education Bill Second Reading (Monday)
- Westminster Hall debate on government support for pupils with English as an additional language (Tuesday)