

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 20 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

It's been colleges and skills week with the Association of Colleges (AoC) Annual Conference and the Skills Show both taking pride of place this week; a chance perhaps for the neglected middle-child of the education system to have its moment in the sun before the much anticipated funding storm clouds of next week.

Given all that FE has been through in recent years, it's remarkable, as the chief executive of the AoC put it, that FE is as flourishing as it is and there was certainly an air of resilience around the Conference this week. There may be cuts and mergers coming, all the signs point that way, but the spirit of indomitability in the sector is warranted for three reasons. First because, FE has a lead role in delivering the government's much vaunted productivity plan, the government and the Chancellor depend on it. Second, because FE delivers on social mobility like no other sector, no need for access targets here, FE hit all seven of the key social mobility targets around participation in learning as the department's latest research itself indicates. And third, and it's been said many times before, FE is the place where dreams can come true; enter with the aim of becoming a trainee or a technician, a chef or a craftsman, and FE will give the skills to help you on your way. It's an alchemy that works.

That said, funding and what the Chancellor might say on Wednesday remains a worry. One of the biggest areas of concern at present is around funding for 16-19 provision, unprotected and looking vulnerable as a result. The Sixth Form Colleges' Association published a disturbing report in the summer suggesting that over 70% of such colleges were considering having to restrict their offer and some 30% were concerned about their sustainability generally. The topic was the subject of an Opposition led debate this week and a link to the Hansard transcript is listed below but in truth little new light was shed and some further re-positioning looks likely.

Away from funding, there have been a number of other developments this week.

For HE, Sir Paul Nurse published the second of the important trilogies reshaping HE at present (the Green Paper and the Spending Review are the other two) with his long-awaited report into the future of research funding, a fairly soft thud here. For FE, two more regions signed up to devo-deals, in each case gaining a greater say over the area-based reviews and future commissioning of adult skills funding. While for schools, Nick Gibb's speech to the Publishers Association Conference and Sir Michael Wilshaw's latest piece on school governance are both worth a read. Links to these and to other matters are all provided in the news section below.

Top headlines this week

- 'Students plan further protests against higher education reforms.' (**Monday**)
- 'Migrants do not lower school results.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Head teachers appeal for funds ahead of spending review.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Ofqual signals it could get tougher on exam remarks.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Budget pressures forcing schools in England to cut staff, survey suggests.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Skills Minister who gave nothing away about spending cuts when he **addressed** the AoC Conference this week but equally called on colleges to be 'more flexible and entrepreneurial' if they wanted a piece of the cake in future
- Labour who held an Opposition debate this week on the threats to FE funding in general and 16-19 funding in particular. A record of the debate in Hansard can be found **here**
- Lib Dem leader Tim Farron who made a lengthy **speech** on the economy as part of the build-up to the Spending Review calling on the government not to cut funding for FE and HE
- Eleven government departments (out of 20) who have now had their future spending plans **agreed** by the Treasury under spending plans to be announced next week
- Sir Paul Nurse who published his **report** on research funding proposing among other things the creation of a new Research UK overseeing body headed by a single Accounting Officer
- The think tank Bright Blue who published further **research** on the decline of part-time students in HE and who called for a lifetime tuition fee loan account and a graduate levy on large employers to help reverse the trend
- Universities UK who have **published** some helpful one-page summaries of key aspects of the recent HE Green Paper
- The Open University which has **announced** a £13m investment boost for FutureLearn to help extend the international reach of its open learning platform
- The West Midlands and Liverpool who have become the latest two regions to sign up to **devolution deals** that will include being responsible for chairing the current area reviews of post-16 skills provision and taking over responsibility for adult skills funding from 2018/19
- Nadhim Zahawi, the government's new apprenticeship adviser, who **blogged** about the importance of apprenticeships and how the government was supporting them
- The National Audit Office who have listed two important **reports** for publication next spring, one on value for money in LEPs and the other on the government's management of Apprenticeships
- UKCES who in their latest 'One Minute' **Update** confirmed that three sectors - manufacturing, construction and non-market services - will provide the lion's share of apprenticeships needed for the 3m target
- The Federation of Master Builders who **argued** that the apprenticeship levy as currently taking shape could have a disastrous effect on the construction industry
- Apprenticeship Trailblazers who seem to have met most of their required objectives according to the chart on page 13 of this final evaluation **report**
- Tower Hamlets and Redbridge Colleges whose merger proposals are out for **consultation**
- Three Shropshire Colleges who have announced **proposals** to band together and create potentially the largest Sixth Form College grouping in the country
- The Publishers Association and British Education Suppliers Association who as part of their Annual Conference this week published **guidelines** on producing the best quality textbooks and resources for subjects such as English, maths and science
- The DfE who published the latest **stats** on initial teacher training numbers for 2015/16 showing primary training courses running at capacity but those at secondary running at 82% of capacity with notable gaps among EBacc subject recruits

- The Education Committee who had an away day at a school in Coventry as it continued its **inquiry** into the role of Regional Schools Commissioners
- Sir Michael Wilshaw who used his latest monthly **briefing** to launch a major review by Ofsted of school governance, claiming that a lot of it was poor quality and that a more professional model was needed with potentially the chair and vice-chair remunerated
- Ofcom's whose latest **report** on media access and consumption provided a fascinating insight into how habits have changed over the last decade with children predictably accessing more and spending more time on different media but with worrying concerns equally about some of its impact particularly children believing what they're seeing
- The OECD who highlighted some of the important lessons that could be drawn from its earlier decade-long **research** into the impact of migration on schools and immigrant families and who confirmed that a fuller report will follow shortly
- ASCL and brownejacobson whose latest **survey** of school leaders listed 'managing a stagnant or declining budget' as the top concern among school leaders over the coming year followed by 'improving exam results' and 'implementing qualification changes'
- The Future Leaders' Trust who published a research **report** arguing that disadvantaged pupils struggle to perform as well in more isolated schools
- The Youth Select Committee who published its **report** into young people's mental health calling for much better support, recognition and funding to be given to the issue
- Cardiff University who carried out one of the largest studies so far on the impact of healthy eating and pupil performance and **found** that children who eat a decent breakfast are almost twice as likely to get better scores in tests and assessments than those who didn't
- Teachers who have been asked to set aside half an hour, typically as part of INSET meetings as teachers return on 6 January or at any subsequent time up to February half-term, to discuss membership of the **College of Teaching**

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Apprenticeships are the future and I want the FE sector to lead the way."* @NickBolesMP
- *"A week off social media can make you happier."* @thei100
- *"Nick Gibb: All secondary schools should stock literary classics like Pride and Prejudice."* @SchoolsWeek
- *"The residents of Coronation Street are more likely to die a grisly death than complete a degree. But why?"* @GdnHigherEd

Quote(s) of the week

- *"It's like saying that somebody who is overweight gets down to a normal weight and then you say well, continue your slimming until you are half your normal weight."* Sir Vince Cable sizes up rumoured further cuts
- *"But you do need, most of you, to change your approach."* The FE Minister doles out some advice at the Colleges Annual Conference
- *"We're not just a department that delivers outcomes for individuals or business, we're also a department that manages a whole range of important economic levers."* The Permanent Secretary of the BIS Dept interviewed a week before the crucial spending announcements

- *“One thing is certain: China won’t be cutting funding for education and training. Let’s hope our leaders don’t make that mistake.”* The chief executive of the Association of Colleges remains hopeful ahead of next week’s Autumn Statement
- *“Telling people the truth with compassion is a really important point.”* Former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Lord Blair advises college leaders on how to handle change
- *“My goodness, a sixth-form college would be better behaved than this.”* Madam Deputy Speaker chides MPS during this week’s Opposition debate on 16-19 funding

Number(s) of the week

- 21% or 6% a year by 2019/20. The level of cuts facing the latest departments to sign up to the Treasury’s spending review terms
- 49. The number of votes by which the Opposition motion on 16-19 funding was defeated
- 499,900. The number of apprenticeship starts for 2014/15, up 13.5% on the previous year, now formally confirmed in the latest **official figures**
- 10.2%. The latest quarterly figure on 16 -18 year old NEETs, down 0.3%
- 31%. The number of teachers in a survey who are unsure if their school has introduced performance-related pay or not (Hint: it’s been in place for 2 years)
- 74%. The number of 12-15 year olds who have a profile on Facebook (although Snapchat is becoming more popular) according to Ofcom’s latest research report

What to look out for next week

- European Jobs and Skills Summit (Monday)
- All Party Parliamentary Group on FE meeting on apprenticeships (Monday)
- Likely publication of OECD’s latest ‘Education at a Glance’ (Tuesday)
- Autumn Statement and Spending Review announcements (Wednesday)
- Proposed second day of action protests by students (Thursday)