

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 22 May 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

By next Tuesday the process of swearing in MPs for the new Parliament should be completed. The day after, the formal process of government will begin when the Queen is ushered in to read out the list of Bills that the government intends to introduce over the next session. It really will be back to business with a vengeance.

For anyone who thought that education might get off lightly this time, it may be time to think again. Not only will a number of the Bills being lined up, most notably those on City Devolution, Enterprise, Immigration and Welfare affect the education and skills system in some way, but one in particular, the proposed Education Bill, is already provoking considerable discussion.

The Bill is intended to deliver on the manifesto pledge of raising performance and diversifying the school system and builds on the Prime Minister's *"all-out war on mediocrity"* speech earlier this year. The aim, as indicated by Nicky Morgan on the Marr Show last weekend is *"to speed up the process for tackling failing schools; extend our academies programme to tackle 'coasting' schools; and deliver on our commitment to open new free schools."*

As the BBC's Education Correspondent Sean Coughlan pointed out, the assault on so-called coasting schools is not new. The same **language** was being used by Chris Woodhead's Ofsted back in 1999 when just the same sort of issues about how to define a 'coasting' school and how many there were, were being aired. As Professor Michael Jopling explained in a **blog** this week, *"There's no agreed definition of a coasting school"* although both he and **Jonathan Simons** at the think tank Policy Exchange had a pretty good stab at it. As to how many there are, this depends on how they're defined but anything between 2,500 -3,000 has been suggested.

While government depts have been busy preparing the legislative programme for the new administration, the Chancellor has been equally busy drawing up plans for the new government's first Budget due six weeks later. This week, George Osborne headed down to the CBI's Annual Dinner to set out some of his initial thinking, much of it of interest to the world of education. Three headlines stand out. First the government intends to tackle the tough stuff first: *"when it comes to saving money, we all know the more you can do early, the smoother the ride."* The new Chief Secretary has already written to depts to get them to go through the books and identify more 'savings.' Second, the government is keen to get to grips with what's holding back productivity and will produce a Productivity Plan by July focusing on issues such as skills training, science and innovation. And third, the mantra for the new administration appears to be *'step up a gear:'* it applies to the economy as much to schools.

Top headlines this week

- 'Nicky Morgan: coasting schools face intervention.' (**Monday**)
- 'Foreign students boost economy by £2.3bn' (**Tuesday**)
- 'More pupils reading for pleasure.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Graduates may face tougher loan terms.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Free school expansion plans launched.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who in a **speech** on immigration confirmed that more effort will be made to train the indigenous workforce and encourage overseas HE students although any associated system abuse will also be tackled
- The Education Secretary who outlined plans to tackle school underperformance and create more school places as part of a proposed new Education Bill
- The new Business Secretary who in his first major **speech** outlined a range of measures, due to be included in a forthcoming Enterprise Bill, to help small businesses and entrepreneurs
- Carol Monaghan MP who will speak for the SNP on education and public service matters
- The Institute of Government who examined the vital statistics of the new administration and **reported** that the average age of cabinet ministers is 50 (Matt Hancock is the youngest at 36,) 2/3 entered Parliament in the last 10 years, a third are women and two are from a BME background
- The Local Government Association who ahead of the proposed Cities Devolution Bill called for a wider **English Devolution Bill** with a new funding settlement to help deliver skills training, affordable homes and safer communities
- The World Education Forum who have adopted a new **Declaration** on the Future of Education which governments are expected to sign up to by the end of the year
- HE Policy Institute Director Nick Hillman who identified **four ways** that governments could try and tackle some of the HE funding issues, including a limited fee rise and tougher loan repayments
- Andrew McGettigan, who in a new **pamphlet** for the HE Policy Institute, examined some of the issues surrounding the accounting and budgeting rules of the student loan system and their impact on future policy
- AoC Assistant Chief Executive Julian Gravatt who wrote a useful **blog** on how the government might meet the challenge of providing for 3m more apprenticeships over the next five years
- Ex government adviser Robert Hill who used a lecture this week to list **10 challenges** likely to face school leaders over the next five years with funding, pupil numbers and teacher recruitment prominent among them
- NAHT general secretary Russell Hobby who argued in a **blog** that the government's obsession with autonomy and accountability were yesterday's war and that capacity, as in more school places and more teachers, were today's battleground
- The fledgling College of Teaching which invited **applications** to become one of 13 founding trustees charged with helping establish the new College
- The House of Commons Library who published a **Briefing Paper** on the GCSE, AS and A level reforms
- Ofqual who **reported** on their review of GCSE maths sample assessment materials and called for some changes to be made before they were sent schools from the end of June
- The Education Endowment Foundation who invited applications to a **£2m fund** that will support five projects looking into the effective teaching of EAL (English as an additional language)
- SSAT Operational Director Bill Watkin who **blogged** about some of the issues surrounding KS2 resits

- The National Literacy Trust, who in its **annual survey** of reading habits of children and young people, found encouraging evidence that more 8-18 yr olds were reading for pleasure
- Researchers who investigated the impact of mobile phones in schools in a **report** commissioned by the Centre for Economic Performance and who found schools that banned them tended to have more teaching time and better results
- The Pre-school Learning alliance who set out an Early Years **Agenda** for the new government built around 3 areas: funding, 'schoolification,' and Ofsted
- The Children's Commissioner for England who urged the new government to adopt a 7-point **plan** to make the welfare of children a top priority over the next five years
- 'Twerking,' 'ridic' and 'dench,' just some of the 6,500 new words that can now be used in Scrabble as it seeks to reflect the rapidly changing nature of language

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Those who underperform at school often become the best teachers."* @tes
- *"Feedback like trust is like a sandwich without the bread filler."* @CParkinson535
- *"Social media more stressful than exams, claims head teacher."* @SchoolsImprove
- *"44% of middle school students prefer taking the trash out to doing maths."* @PathastoMath

Quote(s) of the week

- *"So in the Budget we'll spend less on welfare and instead invest to create 3m more apprenticeships so that young people can learn a trade, get better jobs and earn more."* The Chancellor indicates some of the things expected to be in his second Budget of the year now set for July 8
- *"It's not OK to be just above the level of failing."* The Education Secretary explains the issue of 'coasting' schools on the Andrew Marr show
- *"Avoid acronyms; make talks interactive; use simple slides; incorporate an experiment or other strongly visual material; and always include a Q/A afterwards."* Guidelines issued for next week's Pint of Science Festival in which science topics are taken to pub audiences across the UK
- *"These skills can be developed far more effectively through schemes such as apprenticeships and practical education."* Richard Branson responds to Prince Harry's call for young people to develop skills through a form of National Service
- *"I am deeply concerned for our young children, whose experience of education is now so exam-heavy and whose preparation for life and the workplace is so light."* Ahead of another exam season, Sir Anthony Seldon voices concerns about the effect on young children

Number(s) of the week

- £2.3bn. How much international students contribute to London's economy according to research from business firm London First and PwC
- 42%. The percentage of FE college principals who are female according to research from the AoC, a higher female leadership ratio than in either schools or HE
- 87%. The percentage of staff in FE who find their job stressful, up 14% since the last survey three years ago according to a report by the University and College Union (UCU)

- 12.3%. The latest **stat** for 16-24 yr old NEETs, down slightly at 0.7% on the previous quarter
- 7%. The percentage of schools that have a new assessment system in place for Sept 2015 according to a **survey** from BESA
- One hour a week. The amount of extra time of teaching it's claimed schools could gain if they banned mobile phones

What to look out for next week

- Queen's Speech (Wednesday)