

Policy Eye: (Post-Election 2015)



Highlights of week ending Friday 26 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

For a change it hasn't all been about schools this week.

With a major conference and a significant new report a lot's been happening in the world of skills while HE appears to be bracing itself for a further set of developments around quality assurance as HEFCE's review and government plans on teaching quality both gain momentum. They're not the only ones adopting the brace position. The summer Budget is now just over ten days away and given the likelihood of further cuts (the manifesto spelt out at least two years of austerity), a number of bodies have been making their pitch to the Chancellor. The recent papers from Universities UK and the Association of School and College Leaders provide good examples of these.

But to start with schools where this week the Prime Minister added his voice to the current school reforms: *"the whole purpose of our education reforms is to extend educational excellence and opportunity to every school and community and not just a privileged few,"* and MPs got to debate some of the details as the Education Bill received its Second Reading; links to both are below. Little new came out of the debate although the Education Secretary did reveal the three criteria on which the definition of a coasting school would be based, namely pupil progress, pupil performance data and institutional performance over a 3-year period. Further details at the Committee stage.

On to skills where the government this week released the latest batch of stats on training and take-up, largely positive, training providers and others were in conference at the AELP Annual Conference and Professor Alison Wolf published her latest seminal report, this time on the importance to both the country and to individuals of a vibrant adult skills training service. Skills providers face many challenges but funding chief executive Peter Lauener put the latest one in perspective when he told the AELP conference that meeting the government's 3m apprenticeship target, would mean 'more than one apprentice starting every minute of every day over the next five years.' Unfortunately the Minister was unable to use his speech to discuss funding figures but Alison Wolf's report (linked below) did, confronting one of the big challenges in the training system currently, namely the Cinderella funding treatment of 19+ skills training compared for example to that of higher education. *"I think we should be very alarmed,"* she said, echoing the comments of employers who like the construction sector recently have concerns about a lack of skilled workers

Finally, HE where funding issues apart, the sector is awaiting a keynote speech from the Universities Minister and further developments about the future of quality assessment. HEFCE's review of this area still has some way to run but the government it seems remains keen on ensuring that strengthened procedures are in place as the market expands. More to follow.

Top headlines this week

- 'Four in ten students say university not good value-survey.' (**Monday**)
- 'Let's end this disgraceful charade over academies: Estelle Morris.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Skilled workers may vanish if further education budget cuts continue.' (**Wednesday**)

- 'Numeracy crisis threatens to hold back UK in global data race.' (**Thursday**)
- 'National tests could return for infant pupils.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who outlined the government's new 'zero tolerance' approach to schools in a speech setting out the government's **long-term plans** to extend opportunity to all
- MPs who debated coasting schools, the pros and cons of Academies and adoption procedures in a lengthy debate on the **Second Reading** of the Education Bill
- Shadow Education Minister Tristram Hunt who **called** for local 'city regions' to be given oversight of school standards as part of the latest debate on the Education Bill
- MPs who in another **debate** this time on support for English as an Additional Language (EAL) called for the resurrection of targeted funds to support those Authorities where EAL numbers are greatest
- The Higher Education (Information) Private Member's Bill which will require institutions to provide greater information for students on how its tuition fees are being spent, which received its first reading this week
- The Skills Minister who **addressed** this week's annual AELP conference and as ever raised a number of key questions about skills provision and college structures
- BIS who published latest **stats** showing higher apprenticeship and trainee starts both up and NEET numbers down
- Michelle Obama, who following her successful UK visit last week, has announced the creation of a US/UK partnership '*to improve girls' access to education around the world*'
- Professor Debra Humphries, currently vice-provost at Imperial College who has been appointed as the new V.C. of the University of Brighton from the end of this year
- Universities UK who in the build-up to next month's Budget set out a **case** for why the government should invest in higher education and research arguing among other things that English universities have delivered over £1bn in efficiencies and account for 2.7% of all UK employment
- The **UK Graduate Careers Survey** of students graduating this summer which reported a big increase in the number expecting to go straight into work from university, generally after some work experience, and with consulting, marketing and the media as the most popular options
- The National College for Teaching and Leadership who **announced** a lifting of the cap on recruitment numbers by universities and schools for postgrad initial teacher training courses starting in 2016/17
- The OECD who published a **report** on how the digital economy was growing showing that internet use across OECD nations had soared from 60% of adults ten years ago to nearly 95% now, especially among young people
- Two academics from the University of Birmingham who ahead of the Chancellor's likely announcement of further cuts in his forthcoming Budget Statement **reflected** on whether student maintenance grants might be for the chop
- The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) who ahead of a promised Treasury report on Productivity published its own **recommendations** including better usage of employee's skills and better skilled managers

- Professor Alison Wolf who published a powerful **indictment** about the lack of funding and support for adult skills training and the damage this could cause both the economy and society generally
- UCAS who **reported** on how applicants use those two key words 'career' and 'passion' in their personal statements
- The Education Funding Agency who issued the latest **guidance** on the funding arrangements for core aims in 16-19 study programmes
- The DfE who published a summary **version** of what constitutes the EBacc
- The British Academy who issued the latest **report** to warn about the pressing problems of low levels of numeracy and data skills in the UK, and who called for a more concerted push on improving teacher recruitment and quality
- Careers guidance, the subject of two reports this week, **one** from London Ambitions and backed by the London Mayor and the **other** from All About School Leavers reporting that over 80% of teachers wish they knew more about options other than HE
- Former Education Secretary Estelle Morris who wrote a strong **piece** in The Guardian criticising the government's obsession with Academies
- Progress 8, where the closing date for schools wishing to opt in early closes on 30 June
- Teachers who in the latest Eurydice **report** on the profession across Europe listed: help with teaching students with special needs, with developing ICT skills and with applying new technologies across the workplace as three of their top development needs
- Teaching, **apparently** one of the most attractive professions for those looking for partners

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"What I'd like to see is universities telling students exactly where their money is going."* @nickhillman
- *"Skills has never been so high up the agenda. Where we lead, government follows."* @aelp2015
- *"Is productivity the new buzzword in FE?"* @ FENews
- *"We have to consider whether a general FE college is a model we want for the future when resources are constrained @nickboles."* @tesfenews
- *"Sir Ian Diamond: teachers nervous about numbers deliver number-nervous students."* @roclandb
- *"Maybe Ofsted should move to 3 categories: waving, coasting, drowning."* @joehallg

Quote(s) of the week

- *"This (helping the unemployed back to work) is an essential ingredient of my 2020 vision with 20% more jobs, 20% more university places and a 20% increase in apprenticeship take-up for black and ethnic minorities by the end of the decade."* The PM on his 2020 vision
- *"Work experience has changed from something that was seen as nice to have on a CV to something that's become a necessity."* High Fliers research on how to compete in the graduate job market
- *"The examiner's report provides our tutors with an all too rare chance to prove that they are indeed in possession of a sense of humour albeit as part of a package deal with encyclopaedic knowledge and ruthless expectations."* An Oxford university student responds

to some scathing comments from this year's examiners about levels of English and general knowledge

- *"This is no way to run whenk stalls, never mind a national economy."* Alison Wolf questions the lack of money spent on adult skills training
- *"It's ironic that the students who need the most expertise get the adults with the least expertise."* Professor John Hattie on his latest **'What Works in Education'** polemics
- *"When I see my kids playing educational games on iPads or looking up how-to videos on YouTube I feel a stab of jealousy. But then I think of the tests and targets and homework that I didn't have and I feel a bit sorry for them."* A parent reflects on primary education in an article for The Daily Telegraph

Number(s) of the week

- £23,700. What new graduates from top universities are looking for as a starting salary according to the latest survey by High Fliers Research
- 52%. The number of final year undergraduate students (the first to be paying fees up to £9,000) reporting that their university education had been value for money according to a Radio 5 Live **survey**
- £26. What you get in return for every £ invested in a L2 apprenticeship according to latest **BIS commissioned figures**
- 2000. How many more head teachers may be needed each year to fill vacancies let alone turn schools round according to recent figures from Education Datalab
- 23%. The number of children who reckon playing a computer game with a friend is a form of exercise according to a survey from the Youth Sports Trust
- £210. How much girls, on average, spend on their prom outfits. The average spend for boys meanwhile is half that

What to look out for next week

- MPs Questions to the BIS Dept (Tuesday)
- The government's Productivity Plan and HE QA developments (both expected during the week)