

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 6 November 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

'We won't waste a minute.' That's what David Cameron said as the Conservatives roared back into action six months ago and it's certainly been the case this week with what Tom Bennett graphically described as "a hunter's stew of policy announcements." Here's the main bones.

For schools, the big story has been Nicky Morgan's speech at the Policy Exchange think tank at the start of the week. Billed as her most important speech to date, it showed her prepared not just to continue her predecessor's agenda but stamp her own mark on it as well. The theme was 'educational excellence everywhere,' her take on the real 3Es government should prioritise and contained a mix of updated and newly tuned announcements. The most contentious was around primary assessment: KS2 resits will go ahead and the government will look at assessment and reporting arrangements for 7 year olds. This has raised hackles about a return to KS1 testing and comes as concerns continue not just about the testing load but about how best to set baseline data for progress reporting. The other two big announcements were about the adoption of the EBacc for what will now be 90% of pupils in time, it's currently at 38.6% for state schools, and the creation from next autumn of a new 'Top Gun' teaching force, intended to help out in those parts of the country where needs are greatest. Chris Husbands' blog on the EBacc and Tom Bennett's on the National Teacher Service both listed below offer interesting perspectives on each.

Moving on, the government has also announced this week what it rather grandly calls 'ground-breaking reform to technical and professional education.' This turns out to be another move to consolidate and strengthen the tech route for young people, in this case 16-19 year olds, with an all-through progression pathway of some 20 employer endorsed programmes that will feed young people on to higher-level apprenticeships and other routes. Details at this stage are sketchy, an expert panel under Lord Sainsbury has been set up and will report back next spring. Many will welcome a high-status route, after all status for vocational learning has been an issue for a long time but whether this will bring the simplicity that government desires remains to be seen, particularly as we already have existing prescribed routes for this stage of learning.

And so to the higher education Green Paper, finally launched this morning, and variously described in the media as 'a major shake-up' and 'the biggest reform in decades.' The focus as the title suggests is on teaching excellence through a new evolutionary metrics framework linked to fees, social mobility through a new advisory group and student choice through a wider range of providers. There's a lot in the paper and extensive consultation let alone further technical papers and potentially legislation will follow into 2016/17. Both the [THES](#) and [wonke](#) have excellent summaries. Sign-up for wonke's ongoing analysis and briefings is available [here](#).

Top headlines this week

- 'Ministers consider national tests for seven year olds.' (**Monday**)
- 'Nicky Morgan to send top teachers to struggling schools.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Tougher primary tests and top teachers in weak schools.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Government to scrap GCSE and A level ICT qualifications.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Government plan to allow 'better' universities to raise fees.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- Jo Johnson, the HE Minister, who outlined proposals for a new phase of reform for higher education in a comprehensive **Green Paper** document which will remain open for consultation until mid-January 2016
- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who made a major **speech** on the theme of educational excellence, calling among other things for a review of assessment arrangements for 7 year olds, implementation of the EBacc and the introduction of a National Teaching Service
- The DfE who followed up Nicky Morgan's speech by launching a **consultation** on implementing the EBacc with associated **data** on take-up and achievement in EBacc subjects to date
- The House of Commons Library who published a helpful **Briefing Paper** on the EBacc incorporating the latest announcements from this week
- Professor Chris Husbands who set the **context** for the latest announcement on the EBacc by looking at past governments' attempts to enshrine a core curriculum
- BIS who have announced the creation of a new panel, due to meet shortly and report back in a few months, to help endorse a new **professional and technical track** for 16-19 year olds leading to speedier through-put to apprenticeships and other high-tech routes
- BIS who included a new monthly deadline and an online response survey as it updated its **guidance** on the approval process for apprenticeship standards
- The National Institute of Economic and Social Research who provided a useful research **report** on education and skills provision in the UK, USA, France and Germany as an evidence base for the joint Education Committees' Inquiry into education, skills and productivity this week; p 23-26 has the conclusions
- The **World Innovation Summit for Education** whose latest conference revealed considerable dissatisfaction by member countries about the state of education in their respective countries and in particular in how well/poorly it was preparing young people for the world of work
- NIACE who following its recent link-up with CESI (the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion) will adopt the name of the **Learning and Work Institute** from the start of 2016
- Nadhim Zahawi MP who has been appointed as the Prime Minister's **adviser on apprentices**
- The Association of Colleges (AoC) who published a **blog** looking at some of the issues around the introduction of an apprenticeship levy
- The training company JTL who as the latest BBC Apprentice series got into its full swing set out to explain the differences between the show and the reality, **listing** eight in all
- The Education Committee who held the third of three witness sessions on the role of **Regional Schools Commissioners**
- The NAHT who published a survey **report** on school finances suggesting many were at breaking point
- Ofqual and the DfE who launched the latest round of **consultation** on new GCSEs and A levels covering in this case GCSE short course PE and AS/A level geology and politics, all due for first teaching from 2017 but who faced criticism for not re-developing GCSE and A level IT
- Ofqual who confirmed the assessment arrangements for the new **GCSE Design and Technology**

- Debate about whether independent or state school pupils achieve higher degree levels which **continued** this week with HEFCE amending data from an earlier report to make the case for the former and Cambridge Assessment publishing research on the impact of the introduction of the A* to make the case for the latter
- BBC Education Correspondent Sean Coughlan who **reported** on some of the difficulties schools in many coastal towns face and why this is causing concern
- The NFER who listed **7 building blocks** as part of major research report on helping raise disadvantaged pupils' attainment
- **Tom Bennett** and Professor **Gren Ireson**, each of whom wrote blogs highlighting some of the challenges facing the government as it seeks to set up a new National Teaching Service
- **Shanghai maths teachers**, the latest batch of whom have now arrived in this country to help out with maths masterclasses in English secondary schools
- The **Maths Hub programme** which is looking for a number of secondary school maths departments to join in a new, free programme of training to help teachers develop pupils' maths reasoning
- The Institute of Engineering and Technology who as part of **Tomorrow's Engineers Week** assembled a team of experts to help parents answer some of the more tricky technical questions that children tend to ask
- The **National Literacy Trust** who published its latest survey of teachers. literacy co-ordinators and assistants and reported that nearly a quarter of teachers don't feel confident in teaching the new national curriculum literacy requirements
- The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) who are launching a £10m **campaign** with Northern Rock Foundation to help improve literacy levels particularly for more disadvantaged primary school pupils in the North East
- Binge-watch, *'to watch a complete series of TV programmes at one sitting,'* one of the top words/ phrases of the year included **here** in this listing of words for 2015 by Collins

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Tim Oates: 'we have over-estimated what the national curriculum can do.'* **@SchoolsWeek**
- *"Let experts decide can often mean 'let more people like me have a say.'* **@PEducation**
- *"Rather than literacy, I wish we could talk about poems, literature, creativity...Michael Morpurgo."* **@SchoolsImprove**
- *"Few things give me more pleasure than the all too rare experience of correcting people who say asterix instead of asterisk" @tombennett71 "and the teachers who open their spreadsheets in Edexcel."* **@sxpmaths**

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Whilst adults argue about consultations and fight ideological battles, young people are losing on average 13 months of their education in a school that has already been deemed inadequate, before things start to get better. That can't be right."* Education Secretary Nicky Morgan on the need to transform under performing schools
- *"Ms Morgan is very keen on tests."* One of the professional association responds to Nicky Morgan's announcement about reviewing testing arrangements for 7 year olds

- *“Coastal schools, rural one-horse hamlets, island eyries and urban crucibles alike can struggle to attract the talent they need.”* Tom Bennett on the challenges facing the National Teaching Service
- *“As mass higher education has developed in the UK, it has been tempting for many employers to recruit more and more graduates from full-time HE courses (educated largely at state and individual expense) and then to complain about their lack of employability skills.”* The NIESR report on skills training in the UK
- *“There is no one broadly accepted definition of teaching excellence.”* The HE Green Paper starts the discussion on defining teaching excellence
- *“In higher education, as in schools, hospitals, the law and almost everywhere else, it is no longer possible simply to rely on professionalism-that is so last century.”* Professor Peter Scott on why a Teaching Excellence Framework for HE won't work
- *“Paperwork is not now an aid to supporting teaching and learning but a Frankenstein's monster taking over the whole of education.”* Teachers and others express concern about the paperwork monster in an open letter to the Secretary of State
- *“I don't see the point of exams at 16-they get in the way.”* The outgoing director-general of the CBI remains clear that reform of school exams is needed

Number(s) of the week

- £1bn. How much is probably needed through the apprenticeship levy to help fund the proposed 3m target, according to the AoC
- 45%. The number of school leaders responding to NAHT's survey who reckoned their school budget would be unsustainable within a couple of years
- 67.4%. The percentage of pupils who were not entered for the languages element of the EBacc in 2014/15 (against 22.1% for Humanities and 9.9% for Sciences)
- 3%. The percentage of scripts subject to some form of special consideration this summer according to figures **published** by Ofqual this week
- 76.1%. The number of teachers responding to the latest National Literacy Trust survey who confirmed that their school still had a library

What to look out for next week

- Pearson Policy Hot Breakfast event on HE (Monday)
- CBI Annual Conference (Monday)
- MPs questions to the BIS Dept (Tuesday)
- HEFCE Annual Meeting (Thursday)