

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 9 October 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

This week the annual Party Conference season drew to a close. The SNP have their bash next week but it's back to the more routine business for politicians in England next week. So, five months on from the general election and with a busy autumn beckoning, how's education looking?

A more detailed summary can be found in an accompanying Policy Watch but in terms of headlines, six points stand out.

First, education remains an important priority. It's not in the top three public concerns highlighted by Ipsos-Mori recently but it's certainly in the top ten and a central part of the government's pitch for the centre ground hence why the PM and Chancellor took the lead on education announcements this week.

Second, the economy hangs over everything but it's much more now about how to get the wheels turning a bit better, more jobs, better productivity, higher skills and so on; both the Chancellor and his opposite number had plenty to say about all of this.

Third, it's not just about surpluses and targets, economic policy needs to come with a soul as well, kinder, compassionate, caring, all words used in the Leaders' speeches and all beginning to be displayed in education agendas where issues such as mental health and pupil safeguarding have been raised again this week.

Fourth, for schools, it's pretty much business as before, 'excellence for all,' as Nicky Morgan put it but with mechanisms like funding, coasting and local accountability providing key political dividing lines. Fifth, for FE, missing again from major speeches but with its future being shaped in Treasury plans. And sixth, HE, about to enter a new phase with a Green Paper due out shortly but where debates about fees, funding and visas are never far away.

If, Desert Island Disc wise, one overriding theme or issue had to be selected from the debates and speeches of the last few weeks, it would probably have to be social mobility or in education terms opening up opportunity and closing down attainment gaps whether in schools, FE or HE. It was a theme adopted in David Cameron's speech, "*the brick wall of blocked opportunity*" and in Jeremy Corbyn's "*we have aspirations for all children, not just a few.*" It's the theme also of two reports out today one on the pupil premium and the other on apprenticeships. It binds politicians and professionals alike and as the Social Mobility Commission put it last year, is the ultimate prize for 2020.

Top headlines this week

- 'More than 50% of teachers in England plan to quit in next two years.' (**Monday**)
- 'Private schools condemn exam marking.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Morgan: schools must offer working-day childcare.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Prime Minister warns over extremist teaching.' (**Thursday**)
- 'MPs want better help for poorer pupils.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who re-affirmed his support for more Academies and Free Schools and announced a new registration system for religious supplementary schools in the education 'bits' of his Conference **speech** this week
- The Chancellor of the Exchequer who used his Conference **speech** to announce a number of measures to help stimulate growth in the economy including new powers and simpler funding rules for local councils and the creation of a new National Infrastructure Commission
- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who confirmed in her Conference **speech** that families would have 'a right to request' a full day's childcare before and after school and during the holidays as well
- Nicky Morgan who has written to the School Teachers' Review Body asking for **advice** by next April on how best to apply the 2016/17 pay award of 1%
- The government who **announced** new sanctions, pursuable through the welfare system and the courts, to help tackle school truancy
- The Public Accounts Committee who following a series of inquiries this year on the pupil premium have produced their own **report** concluding that while the premium has helped, there is still not a good enough understanding let alone sharing of what works best in helping close the attainment gap between the richest and poorest pupils
- Jonathan Portes who is **leaving** his post as director of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research
- The British Council, who as this year's Nobel prize winners were being announced, **examined** the educational background of past winners and found that many had studied at some point in the UK
- Key Cities, a group of 26 smaller cities including York, Derby and Cambridge who have **urged** the government not to forget about them as the devolution bandwagon gathers pace
- The Industry Skills Board, a group of employers with an interest in skills issues brought together by City Guilds, who have published a 25-point **action plan** for 'Making Apprenticeships Work' which includes a Levy Board and UCAS style applications for young apprenticeships
- The Sutton Trust whose latest commissioned **report** found that the best top apprenticeships resulted in greater lifetime earnings than some non-Russell Group degrees but that not enough apprenticeships were yet at this top end
- The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) who is inviting **responses** as to how it's doing in its Annual Perception Survey
- The DfE who ahead of the new accountability measures coming in next year, **published** experimental data on L1/2 attainment in English and maths by 16-18 yr olds for 2013 /14
- Ofqual who published in one handy booklet its full postcard collection **explaining** the current changes to qualifications and regulation
- Ofqual who published a **listing** of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications not being reformed explaining in each case why they are being withdrawn
- Leading independent schools who as part of the HMC have been in conference this week reflecting on many of key education **issues** of the day from qualification reform to concerns about mental health in schools

- Dr Sam Carr from Bath University who **examined** the issue raised in a recent NUT survey about so many teachers wanting to leave the profession and suggested that 'suffocation' of motivation and job satisfaction were key factors
- The book retailer Waterstones who **announced** that as sales of Kindles are falling, it will restock the shelves with books instead

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Ofqual chief: exam markers don't do it for the money."* @tes
- *"If you can bake you can do maths."* @Nat_Numeracy
- *"Once students went to university for education, now it's 'an experience.'* @ed_ontap
- *"Let's make a stand and change the world for our girls, one trouser leg at a time!"* @SchoolsImprove (as a parent launches a Facebook group about school uniform rules)
- *"Stop indulging in toffism, says private school head."* @tes

Quote(s) of the week

- *"Today, a teenager sitting their GCSE is more likely to own a smartphone than have a dad living with them."* The Prime Minister reflects on some of the challenges in social reform
- *"Today I am embarking on the biggest transfer of power to our local government in living memory."* The Chancellor launches his so-called devolution revolution
- *"If politicians and others do not fully understand or appreciate what a jewel they have in British higher education, they risk throwing it all away."* The outgoing vice-chancellor of Oxford university on protecting the crown jewels of UKHE
- *"There has never been a better time to be a teacher."* Schools Minister Nick Gibb makes the case at one of this week's Conference fringe events
- *"I was ready to make a 300-mile round trip to see one candidate...before they had another chance to be interviewed by another school."* A head teacher on the realities of the current teacher shortage
- *"At the age of 8, I had a dozen pretend registers and a full-sized whiteboard in my bedroom so that I could 'practice' teaching with my friends."* A trainee teacher tells her story as part of this week's World Teacher Day
- *"If you are a school today, what are you preparing your children for when they are moving into a world when they could live up to 120?"* The challenges for schools just got greater according to the chief executive of Fast Future
- *"What's grammar? An old lady who gives you biscuits."* One from the TES top ten **list** of overhead primary school quotes this week

Number(s) of the week

- 4.7% in primary schools and 1.6% in secondaries. How much the attainment gap has closed by since the pupil premium was introduced in 2011 according to the Public Accounts Committee
- 66%. The number of parents in a **survey** by the Baker Dearing Educational Trust who said that their biggest concern was that their child may not be able to find a job when they leave education

- 61%. The number of teachers in a survey commissioned by the NUT said to be considering quitting over the next couple of years largely due to heavy workloads
- 17. The number of Local Authorities planning for super-size secondaries to cope with rising pupil numbers according to research from the TES
- 94%. The number of leading independent schools reporting concerns about the use of social media, up from 45% five years ago, in a survey by the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference
- 31%. The number of under-fives who according to recent **research** now have their own iPad

What to look out for next week

- Parliament returns (Monday)
- Edge Annual Lecture with Nicholas Wyman (Tuesday)
- BIS Committee witness session on the government's Productivity Plan (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session with Ofqual (Wednesday)
- Initial UCAS deadline date for many 2016 medical, dentistry and veterinary courses (Thurs)
- ResearchEd seminar on edtech (Friday)