

2013/8

30 August 2013

Policy Tracker - Keeping track of what happened in the world of education in August 2013

Main talking points

For many people August is exams results month with its accompanying hopes, fears and familiar rituals. Some things were however different this year. There was for example less about dumbing down with the editorial headline quoted at the end of this paper setting the tone for many. Indeed with entries for core subjects up, demand for HE remaining strong and apprenticeship opportunities stressed, the Government may feel quite satisfied about its reforms but on the downside, entry patterns at GCSE, the future de-coupling of the AS and provision for the more disadvantaged remain real concerns. The two Reports that stand out this month are Ofqual's 2013-2016 Corporate Plan which sets out how much change still awaits the exam system and the Prince's Trust Report which brings home the reality of an exam intensive system on many young people. The prospects for many young people lie reflected between these two spectrums

Key headlines from the month

- Free Schools. First 24 now inspected, 4 outstanding, 14 good, 6 need improving
- GCSE 2013. First drop in 25 yrs in overall pass rate but entries for EBacc subjects up
- GCSE English 2014. Speaking and listening to be separately reported next summer on
- A level 2013. Overall pass rate up 0.1% to 98.1% but 0.3% drop in A*/A grades
- Voc Quals at KS4/5. DfE publish latest version of FAQs for performance table reporting
- NEETs. 1.4% drop at 16-18, 0.5% drop at 19-24 in latest NEET stats
- FE Commissioner. 4 new advisers appointed, commissioner to follow in Oct/Nov
- FE. Bursaries announced to encourage Eng/maths grads to teach in FE
- Industrial Strategy. Offshore wind industry becomes latest sector strategy to be published
- HE. 85% overall satisfaction rating in latest National Student Survey
- HE. HEFCE outlines transition of National Scholarship Programme to postgrads from 2015
- HE. Director and Chair of the new student engagement unit confirmed
- International Education Strategy. MD of the new Education UK Unit announced
- Catapult Centres. Energy Systems and Stratified Medicine Diagnostics now added

Reports/Publications of the month (in order of publication)

- **Widening participation in higher education.** Latest commissioned research from BIS finds a small increase in entries from those on free school meals
- **Interim arrangements for the approval of QCF quals for 2013/14.** The SFA set out new approval criteria as work goes on to develop a new set of business rules
- **Ofqual Corporate Plan 2013-2016.** The Exams Regulator lists over 40 actions needed to implement the Government's qualification reform programme over the next few years
- **Abandoned Ambitions?** The Prince's Trust calls for more vocational support and training for those leaving school with few qualifications
- **Progress Update 2012-13.** The Technology Strategy Board reports on progress made in establishing the first seven 'elite' sector-based technology and innovation Catapult centres
- **The relationship between graduates and economic growth.** Further commissioned research from BIS ups the potential graduate lifetime premium for both females and males
- **Apprenticeship Evaluation.** More commissioned research from BIS finds 72% of employers and 83% of apprentices happy with the results
- **GCE A level data.** The Joint Council report on this summer A level results which see a slight dip in top grades but further increases in maths and science entries
- **Alternative HE Providers: Student Number Controls.** HEFCE consults on draft guidance for 2014/15
- **Measuring what matters.** CentreForum and Pearson call for changes to the progress measure as part of the Government's proposed changes to school accountability

- **Helping the inbetweeners.** Barnardos reports on the lack of suitable careers guidance for young people caught between support systems for the most and least disadvantaged
- **GCSE data.** The Joint Council report on this summer's GCSE results which see a rise in early and multiple entries impacting negatively on overall results
- **Learning for those not in employment.** Learning/training improves the job prospects for over 30%+ of recipients according to this further BIS commissioned research
- **The merit of teacher pay reform.** The thinktank Reform highlight the merits of the new performance related pay system as well as some of the potential pitfalls in introducing it

Speeches of the month

(Intentionally left blank this month)

Quotes of the month

- *"Students from more prestigious universities earn more because they are smarter graduates not because they attended a better teaching institution."* BIS commissioned research on whether going to a particular uni makes a difference
- *"We can see a very stable set of results here."* The Chief Executive of Ofqual on this year's A level results
- *"As soon as you go into the world of work, the last thing on the whole you do is sit down on your own without speaking."* The headmaster of Eton on the relevance or otherwise of GCSE exams
- *"While the overall results were down the changes to the choices being made about when to enter students for GCSEs had a significant impact."* The Chief Executive of Ofqual on the growing issue of multiple and early entries at GCSE
- *"I now realise that failing your exams doesn't have to be the end of the world."* A Job Ambassador for the Prince's Trust on the importance of self belief

Word or phrase of the month

- *'Farewell dumbing down, hello toughening up.'* Media editorial on the 2013 exam results
- *'Escape velocity.'* Economists adopt a more positive tone to describe the economy

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