

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 11 Dec 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

Christmas may be in sight but there's be no let-up in activity this week with a keynote speech from the Prime Minister, a new plan of action for apprenticeships, some important consultations, a significant amendment to the Education Bill and the release of the latest official data on KS2 results all following in quick succession.

The Prime Minister's speech first, important for two reasons. First because it was further evidence of a theme that the Prime Minister has been running with since the election that this is a government that claims it can deliver. He pointed to five areas (more academies, more apprenticeships, more homeowners, more money for the NHS, more family support) where he argued action was being taken. And second because at least two of those five areas, academies and apprenticeships, concern education and training and show how important a priority this is.

Indeed there have been significant developments in both of those education areas this week.

On academies, the government has now tabled amendments to the Education Bill that would see the proposed coasting criteria extended to both academies and free schools leaving regional commissioners with a further issue to contend with. It's also requiring academy sponsors to let parents know what their plans are for schools they are lining up to take over.

On apprenticeships, the government released its latest call for action in the shape of action plan to take us up to 2020 and the summit of 3m apprenticeships. In all, the Paper lists 47 'actions,' that need to be ticked off over the coming months with the first half of 2016 looking particularly busy. A specific listing can be seen in an accompanying Policy Watch but standouts include further levy and funding guidance, more detail on the steps being taken to reform technical and professional education (the Sainsbury group work) and a careers strategy, all due in the first two quarters of 2016. Next year's National Apprenticeship Week which runs from the 14-18 March 2016 looks like being particularly busy.

Moving on to those 'important' consultations, the government proposals on intervening in underperforming and coasting schools closes next Friday while Ofqual has followed up its latest published data on appeals and malpractice by releasing a series of consultations on related matters but with particular interest in the proposals for future enquiries about results.

Finally, we should not forget the official results of KS2 tests, released this week, and showing a further increase (up from 78% to 80%) in the number of 11 year olds reaching the requisite level 4 standard. It meant a welcome drop in the number of primary schools below the floor standard although the media seemed unsure whether this constituted good or bad news.

Top headlines this week

- 'Apple turns stores into classrooms.' (**Monday**)
- 'Failing academies face rapid action.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Tuition fees will depend upon subject.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Wilshaw: make apprenticeships more appealing or risk them going to foreigners.' (**Thurs**)
- 'More than 90,000 exam grades changed.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister whose landmark **speech** seven months on from the general election, outlined five ways in which the government was delivering on its promises
- The government who **launched** a new document on apprenticeships setting out its vision for their development by 2020 complete with a list of dates
- The Skills Minister who **issued** his regular end of term letter to colleges and college corporations highlighting potential opportunities arising out of the spending settlement and underlining again the need for colleges to seize a piece of the apprenticeship action
- The Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy, a new Committee that brings together the other two Education Committees, who have **announced** a new inquiry into careers advice and guidance
- Education Secretary Nicky Morgan who **announced** an amendment to the Education Bill that would bring academies and free schools under the same coasting definition as that for maintained schools
- Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell who was **interviewed** for the Guardian where she started to sketch out her thinking on such issues as local accountability, GCSEs and school tests (basically re-balancing the first one and keeping the other two)
- The BIS Dept who **urged** firms to ensure they had undertaken four simple steps in preparation for the introduction of the National Living Wage from April 2016
- The DfE who **updated** its technical guidance on the 16-19 accountability measures which are due to apply for the first time in the 2016 performance tables
- The DfE who **released** the latest official data on primary performance at Key Stage 2 showing a 2% rise in the number of 11-yr olds achieving the standard L4 in maths, reading and writing
- Universities UK who **published** a Paper on 'Supply and Demand for Higher Level Skills' arguing that the demand for graduates with higher-level skills will remain high for the foreseeable future with some of this caused by a mismatch in job and skill expectations
- HEPI whose latest Occasional Paper **called** for a greater focus on employability rather than employment and which proposed a metric of skills that could be used as a TEF measure
- The Chartered Institute of Building who **called** on the sector to recruit more older workers to help fill the ¼m vacancies projected for the construction industry by 2019
- Ofqual who released latest data on enquiries about results and malpractice for the 2015 summer exam series coupled with a series of **consultations** on enquiries about results, grade boundaries and the Code of Practice
- The British Chambers of Commerce who **hosted** its first Education-Business summit calling for more business leaders to become school governors, for a return to pre-16 work experience and for better destination data
- Teach First who have **teamed up** with Google to help increase the number of computer science teachers
- The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) who **presented** its latest annual survey on teacher recruitment to the Education Committee highlighting among other things concerns about retention and the high cost of agency replacement fees
- Consultation on intervention procedures for underperforming and coasting schools which **closes** next Friday (Dec 18) and which now needs to reflect the latest amendments to the accompanying Education Bill which include an extension of the criteria to academies

- The Rochford Review group who **proposed** additional pre-key stage 'can-do' statements as part of its interim proposals for pupils working below national assessment standards
- Fiona Millar who **tackled** the issue of school accountability in a comment piece in the Guardian and concluded that actually things were far from clear
- Schools Week who **examined** the arguments for and against the use of mobile technology in the classroom and its impact on independent learning
- Apple who have been **embracing** the global 'Hour of Code' project this week by turning its stores into mini classrooms for young people to learn the skills of coding

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"In education, four little words are guaranteed to send me into orbit: 'in the real world.'" @timeshighered*
- *"51% of teachers say they don't have time to deliver employability activities. Proxy for 'don't want to,' 'don't know how,' not relevant?" @davidharbourne*
- *"No morale problem. Teaching isn't a profession in crisis @NickGibbMP tells MPs." @tes*

Quote(s) of the week

- *"A manifesto shouldn't be a wish-list; it should be a checklist."* The Prime Minister confirms that the government is steadily ticking off its manifesto promises
- *"At the heart of this Bill lies our belief that a single day spent by a child in an underperforming school is a day too many."* The Education Secretary on the rationale behind the latest amendment to the Education Bill
- *"The body will be funded by government using public funds as the rest of the governance system is."* The Skills Minister explains how the new Institute for Apprenticeships will be funded
- *"The apprenticeship levy will shift incentives so that it is far more in employers' interests to take on apprentices."* The apprenticeship levy assumption in the government's latest Vision Paper on apprenticeships
- *"If there is a surfeit of plumbers one year, the number being trained is reduced and applicants encouraged into other sectors."* Sir Michael Wilshaw explains how Germany manages labour market supply around its apprenticeship scheme
- *It is less target driven."* A **comment piece** in the Guardian looks at how the German education system has raised its game
- *"If we want our students to have a rich and balanced education, teachers must become curriculum developers again."* John Dunford calls for the teaching profession to regain its curriculum mojo
- *"It's good to just sit there, close your eyes and breathe. It really helps."* The UK's first Happiness Teacher on what really helps

Number(s) of the week

- 2.3%. The percentage of the workforce in large public sector bodies that should be apprentices likely to be set out in a forthcoming government consultation
- Two-thirds. How much of the apprenticeship funding cake the Skills Minister is urging colleges to grab by 2020 (at present it's nearer one-third)

- 50. Roughly how many applications for recognition as an awarding organisation Ofqual receives each year
- 44 (out of 276.) The number of private schools listed as offering vocational courses at A level
- 36.5%. The % of disadvantaged pupils who achieved 5 core A*-C GCSEs in 2013/14 against 64% of pupils overall
- 17%. The increase from last year in enquiries about results according to latest Ofqual data
- 122. The number of formal improvement notices issued to academies and free schools according to the Education Secretary
- 676. The number of primary schools below the floor standard, down by nearly 100 from last year

What to look out for next week

- UCAS publish End of Cycle Report on the 2015 uni admissions cycle (Thursday)
- Social Mobility Commission publish its annual Report (Thursday)