

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 18 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

The final week of the 2015 Parliamentary year and with it a flurry of developments but a moment first to reflect on what's been another eventful year in education.

The defining moment was the election in May of a new government, keen to power on and in the words of the Prime Minister show *'it can deliver.'* So for education, we've had six new education-related Bills, eleven new Committee Inquiries, a new Productivity Plan, HE Green Paper, apprenticeship target, EBacc threshold and National Teaching Service all in quick succession. The political marching tune has been 'One Nation' but as recent reports from Ofsted, UCAS and the Social Mobility Commission have all shown, we've some way to go here yet. We may end the year with worries about children's mental health, teacher numbers, skills funding and HE quality metrics but we should not forget that this year has also seen the best set of recorded KS2 results, more students gaining GCSE English and maths, an increase in apprenticeship numbers and record numbers of people accepted at UK universities. The glass is more half full than often assumed.

So what about this week's developments?

Funding first where the Education Minister announced the revenue settlement for schools and the Skills Minister published the funding plans for FE. For schools, protections for the pupil premium and per pupil guarantees remain but the ESG is showing the first signs of the Chancellor's required efficiencies. For FE, where this week's Public Accounts Committee report, like the NAO Report in the summer, found the wolf not far from the door, the overall budget is £2.4bn this year, rising a further £1bn by 2020. It could have been worse of course but there'll be some tough calls as the two funding streams, one for apprenticeships and the other for adult ed (AEB) take shape.

Second, uni entry where also this week, UCAS published its regular annual report on this year's university admissions cycle. It's a report rich in data, trends and analysis and provides a valuable insight into both educational and social opportunity in Britain. As Chief Executive Mary Curnock Cook put it in her Foreword, *"the increasing numbers are eye-catching"* with more disadvantaged young people, more females, more students from both inside and outside the EU taking up places. Familiar concerns remain however and with disadvantaged young white males falling behind again, the Sutton Trust is calling for more targeted outreach strategies.

Third, and on a related theme, the Social Mobility Commission published its third annual 'State of the Nation' report this week and concluded that despite efforts made so far: *"the divisions in our nation run deep and, arguably, are deepening."* The report makes a number of important recommendations for each stage of education to deliver the 'One Nation' dream envisaged.

Top headlines this week

- 'Lords in revolt over Tory plan to turn all failing schools into Academies.' (**Monday**)
- 'Recruit more state pupils, Oxbridge colleges warned.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Further education funding crisis warning.' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Women take record number of university places.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Progress on social mobility too slow.' (**Friday**)

People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who **announced** that poorly performing children's services would have to improve or risk being taken over in future
- The FE and Skills Minister who **issued** the funding and delivery requirements for the sector for the 2016/2017 financial year with the 3Ls of loans, levies and localism all prominent
- The Education Minister who **indicated** that the minimum per pupil funding guarantee will remain but that efficiencies will start to bite for the Education Services Grant when he announced the revenue funding settlement for schools for 2016/17
- The Education Bill which **saw off** (just) a challenge by the House of Lords over its proposals to fast track 'under-performing' state schools into Academies by restricting the time for challenge or consultation
- The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission who **published** its third annual report suggesting that inequality in some areas was actually worsening and who put forward a number of significant proposals for the world of education to help improve things
- UCAS who **published** its latest annual 'end of cycle' report on admissions to university 2015 with some important data on volumes, trends and differences among social groups
- Lord Stern who has been **called on** to chair the government's review of university research funding and to report back next summer
- The Public Accounts Committee who pulled few punches in a **report** on financial sustainability in the FE sector calling in particular for colleges to be given help and support before rather than after, they reached 'crisis point'
- Martin Lewis, the financial adviser, who said he was ready to **challenge** the government over the freezing of the repayment threshold for student loans announced in the Autumn Statement
- The university think tank million+ who issued a briefing **paper** outlining their initial thoughts on last month's HE Green Paper
- The British Council who published a **report** highlighting many of the benefits such as improved skills, languages and personal development that can accrue from time spent working or studying abroad
- Professor John Latham, Vice-Chancellor at Coventry University, who has been **elected** as Deputy Chair of the University Alliance
- Former Guardian editor, now Principal of Lady Margaret Hall Oxford Alan Rusbridger, who **offered** a fascinating insight into the interview process for Oxford admissions
- YouGov whose recent **survey** of social attitudes found young white men to be the most 'derided' social group in terms of having the most negative traits (the category with the most positives were white women in their 60's)
- The OECD who cast its eye over Scotland's curriculum reforms and while **finding** much to praise, highlighted traditional concerns about maths levels, attainment gaps and assessment
- Ofqual who **published** a range of updated information covering proposals on re-sit opportunities, an update on subjects not being taken forward and a correction on end dates for legacy AS and A levels in Bus Studies and Computing
- The education charity CfBT who is **changing** its name to Education Development Trust with effect from 1 Jan 2016
- Sir David Carter who is being **tipped** as the new national schools commissioner

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Deliberate avoidance of input measures suggests consultation's as open as an oyster with rigor mortis."* @JohnnySRich
- *"My old g/school had feared History teacher, he came in, we all stood, he sat, we sat. Got one A at "0" level History."* @Mowman123
- *"UCAS. The least advantaged young people in England are now 65% more likely to go to university or college than they were in 2006."* @Phil_Baty

Quote(s) of the week

- *"It is a settlement to enable change, not to maintain the status quo."* The FE Minister on the latest funding settlement for the FE and skills sector
- *"The BIS and DfE appear to see area-based reviews of post-16 education as a fix-all solution to current problems."* The Public Accounts Committee questions some of the assumptions behind the current FE area reviews
- *"The government should make the non-graduate track into employment a priority for reform."* The Social Mobility Commission calls for more attention to be given to young people who do not go on to university
- *"We have applied an efficiency saving to the ESG general funding rate for 2016-2017 and the rate will reduce from £87 per pupil to £77 per pupil."* The Education Minister includes the efficiency factor in his announcement on schools' revenue funding
- *"This will be one of the big landmark reforms of this Parliament."* The Prime Minister on the reforms to children's services
- *"Sponsors might want to write to parents when they're first matched to the school to provide more information about them as a sponsor, their ethos and what parents can expect next."* The Parliamentary Under Secretary for Schools explains the thinking behind the amendment to the Education Bill requiring sponsors to communicate their intentions to parents
- *"Keep your eye on the 'professional' committee member who argues over every comma and wastes time."* One of the list of Dos and Don'ts of chairing Cabinet committee meetings revealed this week

Number(s) of the week

- £3.41bn. How big the overall budget for FE will be by 2019/20 according to the Minister's latest missive
- £1,320. The per pupil premium funding rate for primary school pupils for 2016/17; £935 for secondary pupils
- 532,300. The number of people who accepted into UKHE this year, up 3.1% on 2014
- £40m. How much should be put into a new access fund for entry to higher education according to the Social Mobility Commission
- 285. The number of public bodies/quangos that have been scrapped since 2010 according to a new **report** from the National Audit Office (although 184 new bodies of different types have been formed during the same period)
- 1.7m. How many employees are likely to come under the scope of the National Minimum Wage, at a cost to employers of around £804m

- 78%. The number of students in a survey from the NUS who said they experienced mental health issues over the past year
- £1.3bn. How much it costs schools overall to recruit supply teachers according to latest figures from Labour

What to look out for next week

- A Happy Christmas