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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 8 April 2016



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a 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

According to Ipsos Mori in its latest poll, education has risen to number five in the top ten of voter concerns, behind the EU but ahead of housing and a couple of places up on where it hovered for most of last year, including during the general election campaign. The current prominence of such issues as school places, teacher recruitment, academies and young people's prospects may have helped but it's clearly an area that continues to matter to a lot of people including government which is showing few signs of easing up.

Further evidence of this can be seen in this week's activities which have witnessed a government retreat on baseline testing, a series of important reports on the labour market and prospects for young people and further enjoining of forces against the government's academy plans. So on the eve of what will be a lengthy summer term, this is how things look at present in these three key areas.

On baseline testing, the government is saying this is not a retreat but a regroup: "*we'll continue to look at best ways to assess pupils in early years.*" Possibly, but the issue may now move to 7 yr olds, signalled in the Education Secretary's Policy Exchange speech last November as an area in which the government was looking to strengthen the reporting of pupil progress.

The collateral damage may be limited. Many professionals have expressed relief, others have hinted at the need for better dialogue between government and the professions to avoid future pitfalls but the open question is how far this will encourage critics of the government's academy plans. That was certainly the message from the Shadow Education Secretary who in a speech to the ATL Conference this week encouraged opponents of the plans, including it should be said some Tory backbenchers, to join forces. How far there is room for compromise here may depend on the future role of local authority bodies.

Finally skills and transition for young people, the subject in varying degrees of reports this week from the UKCES, AELP and Pearson, and the House of Lords. There's been no shortage of reports in this area but the sad fact is that as the AELP/Pearson and Lords reports both indicate, young people not on the royal route to uni are poorly served. The titles of both reports say it all: '*it's alright for some*' and '*overlooked and left behind.*' As the UKCES report highlights, understanding future labour market trends is critical for young people yet '*smooth transition*' as the AELP/Pearson report puts it is difficult to achieve in the current set-up. The Lords report contains a mass of evidence and strides over some familiar ground but arguably has three core messages in its eight recommendations: 14-19 as a phase; government's duty to monitor; and digitally enhanced careers service. Wolf with bite perhaps



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Top headlines this week

- '7 reasons why England doesn't measure up against a world-class education system.' (Monday)
- 'Children as young as six 'stressed' about exams and tests.' (Tuesday)
- 'Academies plan turns schools into businesses, says union chief.' (Wednesday)
- 'Our schools will not be academies, says major local authority.' (Thursday)
- 'Young not at university 'overlooked.' (Friday)

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- The House of Lords Committee on Social Mobility which published its long-awaited report on [transition from school for young people](#) finding them in the words of the title of the report: '*overlooked and left behind*'
- The government which has backed away, for a while at least, from [baseline testing of reception pupils](#) following analysis which concluded that the three systems proposed would not have resulted in comparable or fair starting points for all pupils
- The DfE which, as part of its follow-up to the PM's speech on Life Chances earlier this year, launched the latest phase of its [Children's Social Care Innovation Programme](#), with £200m up for grabs for innovative programmes that could help improve local services
- The government which launched a consultation on reducing red tape and flexing up arrangements for childcare as part of its manifesto commitment of providing [30 hours of free childcare](#)
- The Education Secretary who presented the Statutory Order for the [implementation of the National Reference Test](#) due to commence from next March
- The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) which published the latest in its series of reports on [changes and trends in the labour market](#) highlighting projected growth in sectors like construction and business services and a continuing shift towards more high level qualifications
- The think tank Centre Forum which published the first of what is intended to be an annual health check on the [state of English education](#) concluding that while performance is improving, we are still some way off achieving the world-class targets it thinks we should be aiming for
- Ofqual which published its [Corporate Plan for 2016-2019](#) listing 3 goals (regulating and reforming general quals; regulating voc quals; developing people, resources and systems) and 7 corporate objectives

HE

- The Times Higher which reported on the 'race' to secure [contracts for undertaking quality assurance](#) in HE for which tenders are due to be announced in the coming weeks
- Andrew McGettigan who examined some of the [anomalies surrounding the gateway process](#) for new providers in a blog on Wonkhe

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- Professor Paul Blackmore who in a commissioned report for the Leadership Foundation examined the tension between [prestige and efficiency in the HE sector](#) and the difficulties this was creating for institutional cooperation
- UCAS which published the [late March deadline set of application stats](#) for 2016 entry showing little change in trend to the previous two months
- The University of Dundee which came top in the [THES listing of best 'young' university](#), where young stands for founded in the last 50 years. It also came 16th in the global top ten 'young' universities which was topped by Switzerland's Institute at Lausanne

FE/Skills

- The AELP and Pearson who published a report calling for the setting up of a dedicated cross departmental steering group to [help young people as they seek to make the transition into work](#)
- Employers who [won't have to pay National Insurance Contributions \(NICs\) for apprentices under 25](#) and earning under the high tax threshold as part of the new tax changes that came in this week (this extends the arrangements already in place for apprentices aged under 21)
- Andy Westwood, former government adviser and current professor of politics, who argued in a comment piece in the TES that [FE could play a key role in delivering the higher-level skill needs](#) required by the economy in the future
- J.K.Rowling, Tim Peake and Victoria Pendleton who topped the list of inspirational living Britons in [a poll conducted by the Learning and Work Institute](#) as part of its build-up to this summer's Festival of Learning
- The Education Funding Agency which has updated its guidance on the provision of [free meals for disadvantaged 16-18 year olds](#) in FE

Schools

- Lucy Powell, the Shadow Education Secretary, who has [expressed concern about the costs and need of full academisation](#), and proposed working with critics from across all Parties to counter the plans
- The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) which discussed workloads, teacher recruitment, handwriting, academies and much more in its [annual conference this week](#)
- The Nuffield Foundation which looked at the prospects for the [latest Smith Review of maths](#) announced by the Chancellor in his Budget last month
- The Cambridge Assessment Team which looked at the role of [teaching styles in maths achievement](#) and, while identifying five featured styles, found little proof that any one boosted achievement better than any other
- Paul Huebl who wrote an interesting blog for the Paul's Place website on ['School Policy and the use of Social Media'](#) highlighting the approach of one particular school

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Nicky Morgan on a desert island? The wildlife would be facing curriculum change."* @tes



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- *“A university is a place where our introverted and our extraverted impulses can come together.”* @RhosannaMLJ
- *“Education is not some bitter pill to be slipped inside a chocolate drop via @tombennett71”* @Iraanaeus 1969

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- *“Thank you.”* Little words that can help motivate teachers but are not said enough according to the government’s Behavioural Insights Unit

Quote(s) of the week

- *“A young person considering their options for further education or employment is presented with gobbledygook.”* The Chair of the Lords Committee on the difficulties facing young people not going on to university
- *“We are not, and never have suggested parents should no longer sit on governing boards... but we want to move to a situation where they are chosen for their expertise.”* Lord Nash, Under-Secretary for Schools, tries to set the record straight on the role of parents following some concerns expressed after the White Paper
- *“There is still a long way to go before the education system performs at what we believe is a world-class standard.”* The think tank Centre Form sums up its annual report on the state of education in England
- *“It asks us to believe six impossible things before breakfast.”* ATL general secretary Mary Boustead launches into the latest White Paper in her Conference speech this week
- *“Illuminators.”* What teachers at Puff Daddy’s new Charter School opening in Harlem this September, will be known as
- *“SMW walks into a bar. “Wine?” No he says, I just think it’s important that I use a platform to speak out where standards are too low.”* Policy Exchange’s Jonathan Simons wins the prize for the best/worst gag following Sir Michael Wilshaw’s (SMW) visit to a local bar this week

Number(s) of the week

- 53%. The number of 16/17 yr olds in 2013/14 who didn’t start A’ levels and thus were faced with a bewildering array of options and lack of support according to a report from the House of Lords
- 54%. The number of jobs in the next eight years that will be held by people with higher level quals at L4 and above, according to projections from the UKCES
- £66,000. How much it costs on average to convert a secondary school to an Academy based on current conversion costs
- 22.3%. The number of young people in 2015 who having failed to reach a L2 in English and maths at age 16 managed to do so by age 19, up from 16.9% in the latest government statistics
- 23%. The potential drop in the number of students likely to gain a good pass in English and maths GCSE following the introduction of more demanding exams and the new grade 5 threshold according to the think tank Centre Forum



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- 83%. The number of teachers saying they're considering leaving the profession in the latest union survey, this time by the ATL, a higher figure than in other surveys

What to look out for next week

- 2016 Creative Education Conference (Tuesday)
- QAA Annual Conference (Wednesday, Thursday)