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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 19 February 2016



*(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

In theory a quieter week for education with many on half-term, MPs away and the PM on duty in Europe but there's been plenty to talk about with two notable themes emerging, one on testing and exams and the other on the welfare of young people. Many people see the two as interrelated – the relentless pressure of testing leading to concerns about the impact on young people.

On testing and exams, this week has seen the NUT call for this year's SATs to be suspended (*"impossible for teachers to deliver,"*) another union leader talk about an *'emerging horror show,'* rumours of a potential showdown coming from head teachers and further up the age scale, the editor of Schools Week suggesting that *"complicated GCSE changes are a catastrophe in the making."*

Part of the regular build-up to the assessment season or a deeper set of issues emerging? It's too early to say yet and some of it has come from the recent release of exemplification materials at Key Stages 1 and 2 which point to a swingeing increase in box ticking if applied properly, let alone residual concerns about baseline testing, more rigorous Key Stage tests and government proposals to pilot times table testing for 11 year olds as well this year. As for GCSE, it too is facing demons with more demanding specifications, a new grading scale, trials for a National Reference Test trial, consultation about the enquiries system and an overall change programme running over three years.

Concerns about the nature and impact of testing are not new of course but two factors are at play this time: the enormity of change involved and the fact that this year the system is perhaps under greater scrutiny than ever before with new accountability and testing arrangements applying and the 2015 PISA test results being published.

Interestingly, failure to succeed in the education system emerged as the second biggest fear facing young people today in a survey released by the Central YMCA this week, (not being able to get a job was the top worry.) The Prime Minister signalled at the start of the year that the government intended to focus on young people's well-being as part of its education agenda this year and just this week alone published a consultation on peer support, a blueprint on Counselling in schools and a set of proposals on age verification for online pornography. The government is clearly taking this area seriously but it's the overlap with testing pressures that's worrying people at present.

### Top headlines this week

- 'US search for next Ofsted head.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Complicated GCSEs are a catastrophe in the making.' ([Tuesday](#))

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- 'Warning over plans to extend nursery free hours.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Percentage of poorer students accepted to Oxbridge falls, figures show.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'LSBF students demand refund after being told to leave UK.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

- The Prime Minister who was on hand to support his local ['pass the torch' apprenticeship event](#) in which, as part of next month's National Apprenticeship Week, a symbolic torch is being taken round parts of the country to signify the transfer of knowledge/skills that is at the core of an apprenticeship
- The government who appear to be looking far and wide in its search for the next [head of Ofsted](#)
- The DfE which has launched a [call for evidence](#) on how peer support can help young people's mental well-being along with a [blueprint on counselling](#) provision in schools
- The Resolution Foundation which has published its seventh annual major [report into living standards](#) suggesting that although family living standards have just about returned to where they were before the financial crisis, over the next five years things will slow down and inequality will sharpen
- John Morgan who argued in a widely supported [comment piece](#) in The Times Higher that the 2012 lifting of number controls rather than the latest Green Paper will be seen in time as the biggest game-changer in English HE
- Becky Francis who will take over as the new [Director of UCL's Institute of Education](#) from July
- PWC which published the results of its latest [annual global CEO survey](#) with Chief Executives generally upbeat but seeing skills and infrastructure as key priorities for the future
- Mike Boxall from PA consulting who [called](#) for more local alliances or partnerships between universities, colleges and local business partners to help solve skills shortages
- BT which [announced](#) a range of opportunities in areas like cyber security and software development as part of an increase in its intake of apprentices and graduates
- The Edge Foundation which welcomed a new Chief Executive and launched a new ['Career Footsteps'](#) campaign to encourage employers to go into schools and colleges and help inspire young people
- The Skills Funding Agency which launched further guidance and information on how it will list qualifications eligible for funding as part of the [19-23 yr old's legal entitlement](#) to a first full L2/3
- The FE sector for whom plans for a summer (7-9 July 2016) [Festival of Skills](#) were announced
- The AoC which criticized the government's [decision to scrap 'child' visas](#) which are used by many international students to continue their studies in England
- Julian Gravatt, Assistant Chief Exec at the AoC, who examined some of the issues facing [Sixth Form Colleges](#) as they consider whether to convert to Academy status
- Central YMCA which [surveyed young people](#) (16-25 yr olds) about the challenges they feel they face in Britain today and found being unemployed, failing at school/college and body image, emerging as the top three concerns
- Ofqual who are inviting students to give their [views on exam marking reviews and appeals](#) as part of its wider consultation on the matter



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- Schools Week's Laura McInerney who wrote a [comment piece](#) in The Guardian highlighting some of the challenges involved in the current changes to the GCSE system
- The OECD whose latest [briefing paper](#) looked at how member countries organize learning time in primary and secondary education and found, for instance, that typically pupils face 4.3 hours of instruction per day in primary and 5.2 in secondary
- The National Union of Teachers (NUT) who have called for [this year's SATs to be suspended](#) as concerns grow about the demands expected of both pupils and teachers

## Tweet(s) of the week

- *"US marshalls are arresting people who haven't paid back student loans."* @Independent
- *"We've degraded education in the hunt for A' stars via @thetimes.Seldon talks sense again."* @andyhampton
- *"Believe me-being an English literature student is a lot harder than it looks."* @Independent
- *"Just a reminder (for those that have it) that matutolypea is the state of being irritable/best left alone in the morning."* @ susie\_dent

## Word or phrase(s) of the week

- *"Academic superheroes."* What some researchers found was required when they analysed the selection criteria, (problem-solver, creative thinker and so on,) for posts offered by universities in Australia

## Quote(s) of the week

- *Being interesting as education secretary is asking for trouble. So now we have Nicky Morgan who is trying the opposite approach.* Political correspondent John Rentoul on the renaissance of Michael Gove
- *"My job was to make the best of a bad job and produce a system which was genuinely progressive."* Former BIS Secretary Vince Cable reflects on making the best of the tuition fees hike
- *"It is a global language, more global than French or German or Spanish or for that matter even English."* A Florida Senator proposes that students should be encouraged to learn coding before a foreign language
- *"The temptation to expand too fast in order to meet economies of scale has seemingly befallen many chains in recent years."* Natalie Perera, director at the think tank CentreForum, on the rise and rise of Academy chains
- *"Can anyone explain how the balance between teaching, learning and testing has got so badly out of kilter in English primary and secondary schools?"* One union leader with more than a rhetorical question
- *"All schools should offer it – everyone has problems small or big."* Young people make the case for the provision of counselling in schools
- *"The response has been overwhelming."* One of the organisers heralds this week's academic symposium on The Archers (a soap opera on Radio 4!)



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## Number(s) of the week

- 5.1%. The (October-December 2015) unemployment rate in the latest new, improved presentation-wise figures from the ONS
- 0.5%. How much average incomes are likely to have risen between 2007 and 2020 according to the Resolution Foundation
- 56.8% and 55.7%. the number of state school students at Cambridge and Oxford Universities respectively according to recent HESA (HE Stats Agency) data
- 100 in 100. The latest apprenticeship recruitment campaign in which MPs in each constituency are encouraging businesses to pledge to recruit 100 apprentices in a 100 days
- 2.2. How many hours in an average primary school day is given over to the core curriculum (reading, writing, maths and science) according to the latest briefing from the OECD
- 28. The number of ex-servicemen and women who have gained QTS (qualified teacher status) so far. Over 500 applicants are in the pipeline with the government initially targeting 2,000

## What to look out for next week

- Final consideration of Lords amendments to the Education Bill and to the Welfare and Work Bill (Tuesday)
- Launch of the Work Foundation's 'Health at work' Policy Unit Paper (Tuesday)
- Nicky Morgan to speak at the AoC Principals and Chairs event (Wednesday)
- Apprenticeships4England Conference (Thursday-Friday)