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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 26 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

The EU Referendum has begun to make its presence felt with the Education Secretary making clear her position at the start of each of her set piece speeches this week. It's 'in' by the way and follows the open letter to last week's Sunday Times from leading University Vice-Chancellors also pressing the 'in' case. The value of the UK education export industry is estimated to be around £18bn and includes international students, foreign skills contracts, language teaching, to all sorts of exchange activity so the sector has a strong interest in seeing how things shape up and will be keen to make its views known.

More immediately this week has seen a new Bill, new Plans, new concerns and a new trend all emerging.

The new Bill, new in the sense that it's about to join the devolution of skills and local growth planning on to the statute book is the Education and Adoption Bill which completed its passage through Parliament this week. The Bill provides levers for further 'academisation' of the school system and in many people's eyes tips the balance firmly in favour of the Secretary of State as the quote (see section below) from John Pugh MP highlights. Both the [TES](#) and [Schools Week](#) have helpful summaries of the Bill.

The new Plans come in the shape of the Dept Strategic Plans for the remainder of this Parliament, released finally at the end of last week. There's few surprises, most of the objectives were listed in the Manifesto but there are some notable snippets: BIS moving to digitalise services, the DfE looking to secure £1bn a year from more efficient procurement services in schools, some specific apprenticeship focus, for example. A link to the Plans for DfE and BIS can be found below.

The new concerns emerge from the various studies published this week about school performance. The work from Durham, Loughborough and UCL's IoE, all listed below, raise important questions about just how well our young people really are doing and how far advantage/disadvantage remains a key determinant.

Finally, the new trend. Early stages yet but the story from Stoke-on Trent that local leaders have decided to plunge in and take a lead on raising maths performance among young people follows criticisms earlier this year from the Chief Inspector that local civic leaders weren't doing enough to raise school standards. With Stephen Twigg heading up the Liverpool Challenge and Tristram Hunt MP backing the Stoke venture, perhaps, just perhaps, a new trend of local leadership is emerging.

Top headlines this week

- 'Minister relaxes deadlines for submitting controversial new primary assessments.' ([Monday](#))

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- 'Poor GCSEs could kill Northern Powerhouse hopes, Ofsted chief warns.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Lily Cole challenges MPs on illiteracy.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Higher education Bill odds-on after Cameron backs legislation.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Warning over England's teacher brain drain.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- The Education and Adoption Bill which completed its passage through Parliament and now awaits the royal assent
- The Education and Business/Skills Depts which have updated their Dept Plans with [strategic priorities](#) for the next four years and progress made so far
- The Education Secretary who took to social media to [rebut concerns](#) about this year's primary assessments
- The Education Secretary who made [keynote speeches](#) to the City of London and to college leaders in both cases stressing how the government was going about reforming the education and skills system
- Treasury Minister Lord O'Neill who told the [Northern Powerhouse Conference](#) that the next phase of development will focus heavily on the region's skills gap
- The government which issued its response to the [Youth Select Committee report](#) on Young People's Mental Health supporting many of the 17 recommendations and pledging continued action
- Anthony Watson, a former Nike executive, who has been recruited by the Labour Party as chair of a [business and enterprise advisory council](#) to help the Party strengthen links with the business world
- Project Literacy, a major [global literacy project](#) supported by leading companies including Pearson, which launched a new awareness campaign this week built around the 'Alphabet of Illiteracy'
- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) which published an [interesting insight](#) into education, housing and other social trends among young people (20-34 year olds) showing for instance that the numbers staying on in education, living at home and getting married later, are growing all the time

HE

- 103 University Vice-Chancellors who signed an [open letter](#) to last week's Sunday Times arguing that staying in the EU would be better for UK Universities (for those interested in this area presentation and audio material from the recent HEPI/HEA event on the referendum can be found on the HEPI site [here](#))
- Colin McCaig, Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam, who in a [blog](#) for Wonkhe examined what impact the lifting of the numbers cap was having so far on the HE sector and found a mixed picture
- The Higher Ed Policy Institute (HEPI) which ahead of the development of a framework of metrics for teaching excellence in HE published a [Paper looking at how ratings systems](#) apply elsewhere in the public sector and what lessons could be learned for HE

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FE/Skills

- The Institute for Apprenticeships, further details of which have now been drafted into the [Enterprise Bill](#)
- The Skills Funding Agency which has announced that [subcontracted provision](#) under advanced learner loans will not be permitted from the 2017/18 funding year
- The City and Guilds Alliance for Vocational Education which published a report from the Centre for Real-World Learning on [developing employability skills](#) for young people
- Bill Watkin who takes up the post of Chief Executive of the [Sixth Form Colleges Association](#) in April

Schools

- Sir Michael Wilshaw who used his [address](#) to IPPR's 'transforming cities' seminar to highlight the gulfs in attainment in a couple of Northern cities and called on local civic leaders to take a lead in raising
- Sir Michael Wilshaw who in a busy week claimed in his latest [Monthly Commentary](#) that lured by tax-breaks, warmer climate and 'respect' for traditional English education, teachers were "*flocking abroad*"
- The Sutton Trust whose latest [report on 'Leading People'](#) looked at the educational background of those in leading professions in 2016 and found a private school background still holding a tight grip
- Durham University's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring which published a report comparing the [academic achievements of state and independent school pupils](#) and found the latter two years ahead
- The Maths Education Centre at Loughborough University which published a [report on maths standards](#) over recent years and found that while these had dropped in the period before the 1990s, there was no evidence to suggest a similar decline subsequently
- Dr John Jerrim of UCL's Institute of Education who carried out further [research on recent PISA test data](#) and who concluded that despite the acknowledged improvements in London schools, the capital's teenagers still lagged behind counterparts in many other competitor countries
- Stoke-on-Trent which has launched a [£1m maths excellence project](#) that will see partnership groups set up for existing teachers, tuition fees and relocation payments for new teachers and a big push generally to get 70% of pupils (rather than the current 59%) reaching good GCSE standard in the next three years
- The College of Teaching which has so far failed to [crowdfund the funding](#) needed to release teachers to help set the College up
- '*Miss, I like your eyes. Are they real?*' One of a list of [quirky things said to teachers](#) and collated in a list by TeachFirst

Tweet(s) of the week

- "*Teaching excellence: there is no 'ideal lesson' formula.*" [@timeshighered](#)
- "*Ofsted's next top dog will be a real Rottweiler.*" [@tes](#)
- "*University students are less drunk than they used to be.*" [@Independent](#)
- "*Computers can detect boredom by how much you fidget.*" [@tele_education](#)



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Word or phrase(s) of the week

- *“Flipping workload.”* Not an exasperated teacher but former Schools Minister Jim Knight on how technology might just help ‘flip’ the balance between teaching and paperwork for teachers

Quote(s) of the week

- *“Every decision will have to pass an #EURef test.”* Julian Gravatt writing in Wonkhe about some of the difficulties the Chancellor faces as he draws up his latest Budget
- *“Does the balance of the Bill not concern him in that it gives at least seven new powers to the Secretary of State, but not one new power to parents?”* Lib-Dem MP John Pugh challenges the Schools Minister in the final debate on the Education Bill
- *“Yes, we’ve reformed the primary accountability system and no, we’re not downplaying the scale of that change.”* The Education Secretary puts critics of the new primary assessment regime straight
- *“I don’t agree with everything he’s done but his determination to speak his mind has served the education system well.”* Former Education Secretary Estelle Morris enters the debate about who should succeed Sir Michael Wilshaw
- *“I thought it went well until I realized my flies were undone.”* One of a number of work experience mishaps reported on [The Guardian](#) website this week

Number(s) of the week

- 68.9%. The success rates for apprenticeships in 2013/14, the last year for which full figures are available, continuing a downward trend that is worrying many
- 853,000. The latest (end of 2015) UK wide NEET figures for 16-24 year olds, down against the same figures at the end of 2014 but up slightly (by 5,000) on those in the summer
- £1,000. What one college has pledged 16-18 year old eligible students if they don’t succeed in moving into further learning, an apprenticeship or a job six months after completing their programme of study
- 1%. The number of teachers leaving to work abroad according to the DfE as it responds to the Chief Inspector’s claim that ‘thousands’ were heading abroad
- 3.3m. The number of young people (20 - 34) living with their parents in 2015, up from 2.7m 20 years ago

What to look out for next week

- World Book Day (Thursday)
- Education Committee witness session with Ofsted (Wednesday)
- BIS Secretary addresses the British Chambers of Commerce Annual Conference (Thursday)
- ASCL Annual Conference (Friday, Saturday. Sir Michael Wilshaw presents on Friday, Nicky Morgan on Saturday)