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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Thursday 24 March 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

Easter is traditionally a time when many teachers get together in Conference. NUT members for instance are heading off to Brighton at the end of this week while the NASUWT will be in Birmingham. With last week's Schools White Paper continuing to attract attention let alone provoke petitions and rallies they'll have plenty to discuss.

There's a lot in the White Paper. Our own little summary this week has identified nearly 40 separate actions that the government is lining up for over the next five years, generally around structures and systems. But what's really raised the temperature is the formal proposal to dismantle the local authority system of schooling and replace it with one where all schools eventually become academies. The issues are well captured in two comment pieces this week which are worth reading. First a [blog](#) by Professor Chris Husbands laying out the historical context of a century or more of paternalistic local authority oversight and second a powerful [piece](#) in this week's Guardian by Peter Wilby highlighting the threats the move proposes for local accountability and democracy. The Conservative government has always been clear about its intentions but the White Paper has brought the realities of system reform to the surface and will provoke a fierce debate, and not just over this weekend, about the future nature of our school system.

Accountability in some form has been the theme of two other reports out over the last few days.

First, the National Audit Office's (NAO) report on LEPs, published as the Communities Secretary was urging LEPs at their Annual Conference this week to embrace the devolution revolution, but in which the NAO raises concerns about the increasing demands being placed on LEPs. It's a familiar tale: an incoming government creates a new focused infrastructure to deliver things more efficiently than the previous lot but then piles on the demands as things gather pace generating concerns again. If, as the report suggests, LEPs typically have anything between 0 and 80 full time equivalent staff to deliver expectations on local growth, devolution and so on, then it's not just capacity but value for money and accountability that can get compromised as the report suggests.

Second, HEFCE's proposals for a revised operating model for quality assurance in HE in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The proposals follow considerable consultation but come as the government is considering its own reforms on HE performance, generating an inevitable sense of jockeying. HEFCE is offering what it calls an '*intelligent regulation*' system covering both new and established providers with assurances for students but a lot may depend now on the next moves by government. For those interested in this area, [wonkhe](#) and the [THES](#) have excellent summaries and updates.



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Top headlines this week

- 'School academy plan doomed to fail warns Blunkett.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Speedy academy plans risky, says school body.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'UK universities top for maths and English in latest world rankings.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Students given two final chances to sit legacy GCSEs.' ([Thursday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- The Education Committee which endorsed the appointment of Sally Collier as the Chief Regulator of Ofqual but recommended she get some 'getting up to speed' primers on some of the more intricate areas of qualification development and assessment
- Shan Scott who has been appointed as the [new Chief Schools Adjudicator](#)
- Communities Secretary Greg Clark who urged LEPs at their Annual Conference this week to be ambitious in their bids for some of the remaining [£1.8bn Local Growth Funding](#) available to support economic and skill projects in their local areas
- The National Audit Office which published its [report on LEPs](#) arguing that as they have been increasingly asked to take on more and more responsibility meaning issues of capacity, project value for money and accountability have become more evident
- The Careers and Enterprise Company which announced the winners of its new government matched Fund intended to help with [careers advice and support](#) for some of the least privileged young people
- The Social Market Foundation which reported on the [growing numbers of people who were self-employed](#) noting that many of these were poorly paid and often in households already suffering from low incomes
- The UK which came in at 23rd in the latest [World Happiness Report](#) (Denmark and Switzerland were the top two with Syria and Burundi the bottom two out of 157 listed countries)

HE

- HEFCE which [reported an operating surplus of 5.8% of income for 2014/15](#) for the publicly funded part of HE but noted significant institutional variations in its latest report on the financial health of the sector
- HEFCE which in a new blog, examined the [issue of part-time study](#) and why the numbers were falling
- The Social Market Foundation which along with University Alliance and the OU published [a new report on widening participation](#) concluding that on current trends at least, government targets won't be achieved by 2020
- The [2016 World University Rankings by subject](#) which were published this week showing strong performance by UKHE institutions in many core subjects



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FE/Skills

- The FE Commissioner who wrote to College Chairs and Principals with [a half-time briefing on the area reviews](#)
- AELP which published an update on [how the Apprenticeship Levy is intended to work](#)
- Colleges which received their [2016/17 funding allocations](#) from the Skills Funding Agency this week showing an increase in allocations for apprenticeship and traineeship provision
- The Skills Funding Agency which published the latest figures on [learner participation in adult learning, apprenticeships and traineeships](#)
- The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission which submitted [its response to the education Committee's Inquiry into apprenticeships](#) calling for more support to be given to encourage 19-24 yr olds to take up an apprenticeship
- Ofsted which published a progress report on [how well the FE sector was preparing high needs students](#) for adult life and found considerable variation in what was provided and how
- CITB which along with the construction company Carillion is working with Lambeth College to help set up a new [skills academy](#) in London to help develop construction and STEM skills

Schools

- Petitions and marches which are being lined up by those who oppose the mass academisation of the school system
- The education 'action-tank' LKMCo which published an interesting [geographical analysis of where people were signing the anti-academy petition](#) in the greatest numbers
- Ofqual which confirmed important [resit arrangements for legacy GCSE, AS and A' levels](#) following earlier consultation
- The Guardian which published the results of its [latest teachers' survey](#) highlighting the numbers stressed (73%) and planning to leave in the next five years (43%)
- The DfE which has promised further guidance this summer on [UTC applications](#) ahead of the October closing date
- The NUT who meet in Annual Conference this weekend and who are due to [debate possible boycotts of primary tests](#)

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"Staying in school longer won't boost you income unless you're in the mafia, study suggests."* @tes
- *"Children put in the bottom maths group at primary believe they'll never be any good. Via @ConversationUK."* @mikeNatNumeracy
- *"Children around the world spend less time outside than prisoners, Global Study reveals."* @SirKenRobinson

Word or phrase(s) of the week

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- *“Flabby liberalism v muscular centrism.”* Apparently we need more of the latter and less of the former according to Tony Blair in a speech last week covered by the BBC

Quote(s) of the week

- *“My advice to Nicky Morgan and her successor has to be waltz with the chancellor but dance to your own tune.”* Advice from a previous Education Secretary (David Blunkett) to the current one
- *“She accepted that she would be on a steep learning curve.”* The Education Committee reports on its pre-appointment hearing with the new Chief Regulator
- *“Since the EBacc was announced, the percentage of state school pupils entered for at least one GCSE in an arts subjects has increased.”* The Schools Minister continues to defend the strength of the arts in the school curriculum
- *“I just want to do what I love without all the red tape and stress.”* One of the responses to the latest Guardian teachers’ survey
- *“They’ve gone bonkers.”* The reaction of some Tory councillors to the latest academy plans
- *“Young people are being pushed into adult territory well before they are ready.”* Shadow Education Minister Lucy Powell responds to the latest concerns about sexting

Number(s) of the week

- £1.6bn. The operating surplus for publicly funded HE institutions in England in 2014/15 according to the latest figures from HEFCE
- 6%. The dropout rate for young first degree entrants who enrolled in 2013/14 according to latest stats (the first rise in four years)
- 251,100. The number of apprenticeship starts in the first two quarters of 2015/16, up slightly on last year and with a significant increase in higher level apprenticeships
- 30,000. How many young people (19-24 yr olds) should be doing an apprenticeship by 2020 according to the Social Mobility Commission (up from the current 4,000+)
- £9.5bn. The sum of money available under the Careers and Enterprise Company’s Investment Fund for careers support for young people
- 13. The number of applicants for the post of Chief Regulator for Ofqual as indicated in this week’s Report by the Education Committee
- £483.93. A precise figure but how much the tech contents including tablets, consoles and digital services, tot up to in a British child’s bedroom according to a survey from VoucherCodes.co.uk

What to look out for next week

- NUT Annual Conference (this Friday to next Tuesday)
- NASUWT Annual Conference (this Friday to next Monday)