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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 9 December 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

A lot obviously on PISA this week but also a slew, if that's the right word, of reports to remind us in this festive season that life can be very hard for many people.

On the good news front, teachers came out well in the latest Veracity Index of the most highly trusted professions, pretty important in a year when post - truth has dominated, and according to at least one expert, teachers don't face the same threat of being replaced by robots as some other occupations do. A link to the story on this can be found below, under 'Phrase of the Week.'

But PISA first where the performance of UK 15 year olds in the latest round of international assessments came under scrutiny. The assessments this time round, (they happen every three years,) focused on science along with maths, reading and problem solving and were taken by 540,000 students across 72 nations. The media tends to focus on the international rankings but it's the mean scores that give a truer picture and compared to not just last time in 2012 but the two previous times before that, have hardly shifted. In the words of the assessment expert Professor Coe: "for the UK as a whole this is not a bad result: essentially no change."

The full PISA results come as part of a massive report and there has been some excellent analysis from the TES, Schools Week, NFER, Education Datalab and Sam Freedman among others as to what it all means. A few points stand out.

First, while our overall results aren't too bad, our mean scores in each of the three core areas have dropped a bit and we still have a hard core of low achievers in maths. Second, in terms of the UK, the 'we' needs to be disaggregated; Scotland and Wales have performed more poorly than England and N. Ireland. Third, the importance of teaching and teachers remains self-evident; the report highlights for instance, the impact of effective teaching strategies in UK science teaching. Fourth, Singapore swept the board raising again the issue of teaching to the test rather than the person. And fifth, remember when Michael Gove said after the last PISA tests in 2012 that we needed to reform the exam system because we were stagnating? Early days perhaps but as schools know only too well, moving from good to great is not always a simple process.

As for those other reports, a number have come out this week looking at a range of associated social issues. They're all listed under General Policy below and include the Casey Report on community cohesion, the Children's Commissioner's proposed inquiry into prospects for young people in the North of England and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report into poverty and social exclusion. They're a salutary reminder in this week of international rankings that elsewhere often lie equally inspiring stories of personal endeavour.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Maths and science teachers in England among the world's unhappiest.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Pisa tests: UK lags behind in global rankings.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Northern parents need to copy pushy Southerners, children's commissioner says.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Calls for 'complete overhaul' of UK application process.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Children of just managing families left out by grammars.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [PISA points](#). The OECD published the results from its PISA assessments in science, maths, reading and problem solving taken by around 540,000 15 yr olds across 72 countries in 2015 with overall performance by the UK not greatly different to the previous assessments in 2012
- [Living in poverty](#). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation presented its latest annual report into poverty and social exclusion using data collected by the New Policy Institute, finding overall poverty levels not greatly changed but rising housing costs and disability major determinants of poverty for many working families
- [On the case](#). Dame Louise Casey published her independent but commissioned report into integration and community cohesion in the UK highlighting a number of issues where integration wasn't working and recommending among other things more English language provision, more emphasis in schools on British values and the adoption generally of an integration oath
- [Our friends in the North](#). The Children's Commissioner published some initial research showing that disadvantaged young people in the North of the country tend to get poorer results and are less likely to go to top - ranking universities than their peers in the South as she announced a year - long study into the causes of such regional disparity
- [Agency work](#). The Resolution Foundation launched a major piece of work into agency workers with a report arguing that their numbers are growing, they don't conform neatly to type but are likely to have a major impact on the way the economy operates in the future
- [Developing an Industrial Strategy](#). The think tank Policy Exchange launched a major piece of work around developing a new industrial strategy arguing that it should be built around four elements: productivity; place; innovation; environment
- [Trust me, I'm a](#). Ipsos Mori published its Index of which professions are the most trusted which showed nurses, doctors and teachers heading the top three, and politicians, journalists and estate agents the bottom three

HE

- [Dear Sir/Madam](#). The Education Committee published the full list of responses received (all 190) to its inquiry into the impact of Brexit on UKHE with some familiar concerns about visas, freedom of movement and the future positioning of UKHE generally all evident
- [Checking it works](#). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) announced some new tools to help universities measure how much impact the financial support provided through access agreements was having on student progress and outcomes



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- **Reaching out.** HEFCE reported on its National Collaborative Outreach Programme, a funded Programme that will run to 2020, targeting access 'cold spots' in particular in support of the government's widening participation goals
- **REF check.** HEFCE and the other UK HE funding bodies launched a consultation on the proposed arrangements for the next round of the Research Excellence Framework (REF)
- **Choice and challenge.** The Higher Education Commission announced a new inquiry, due to report in June 2017, looking at the potential role and impact of challenger or alternative delivery models in HE

FE/Skills

- **Going Places.** The Skills Commission launched its latest report focusing on innovation in the FE sector and ways in which it can be developed to help meet the needs of local communities and learners in the future
- **LEP concerns.** The Daily Mail launched a sharp attack on the distribution of public funds through LEPs claiming this was being used too often to reward friends and officials rather than drive economic growth as originally envisaged
- **Supply and demand.** The chairman of the Association of Recruitment Consultancies (ARC) highlighted the unfairness of supply workers being included on a company's payroll for apprenticeship levy purposes, in a comment piece on FE News
- **Qualified to practice.** The Education and Training Foundation published updated guidance on the qualifications needed for teaching in the education and skills sector

Schools

- **Opportunity knocks.** The Education Secretary visited Blackpool, one of six Opportunity Areas announced in the Secretary of State's Conference speech in October where additional funding and support will be provided to help young people get training and support to help them progress
- **Pay grades.** The government published a stack of data on recruitment and teacher numbers as it submitted evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body which is currently considering, for the fourth year running, the case for an average 1% pay rise
- **Choices at 16.** The Social Mobility Commission reported on some important research from Education Datalab on the extent to which disadvantage and lack of opportunity at age 16 can affect long - term career options
- **Gaps at 16.** The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IfS) reported on some work on 'Family Background and University Success,' to which it and other organisations had contributed, arguing that attainment throughout school but particularly by GCSE played a crucial part in opening up access to university
- **Predictive A' level grades.** The University and College Union (UCU) published the results of some commissioned research suggesting that huge numbers of predicted grades at A' were inaccurate (although the precise figures were disputed by UCAS) and calling for a post-qualification admissions system (PQA) to be re-considered
- **Informed Choices.** The Russell Group of leading universities published the latest, and fourth edition, of its guide to choosing the best combinations of 'facilitating' subjects for entry to university arguing that the changes to AS levels have made choosing the 'right' subjects even more important



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- **Gaps in Grammar.** The Sutton Trust published new research showing that disadvantaged and ethnic minority children often missed out on grammar school places and called on the government to halt its grammar school plans accordingly until admissions issues were resolved
- **Budget squeezes.** The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) with Browne Jacobson advisers published its latest survey of school budgets noting that 95% of school leaders see balancing the books as a top priority for the coming year
- **Scouting for talent.** The think tank, the Centre for Social Justice, argued that rather than recruiting by stealth, grammar schools should use outreach work and targeted interventions to try and recruit talented young people

Tweet(s) of the week

- “Ugh. #PISA day is so commercialized nowadays. I remember PISA2003, when only the cool kids knew about it, and the UK didn’t even score in it” - [@PXEducation](#)
- “Quick question: when was the last time there weren’t any education reforms in the UK?” - [@Ben_Culverhouse](#)
- “When we can no longer fill skills gaps with migrants, we’ll need a world-class education system” - [@jenniersl](#)
- “Michael Gove says the Turner prize is modish crap” – [@Telegraph](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- Will technology replace teachers? Automation is affecting many jobs, potentially 15m could be at risk according to the chief economist at the Bank of England, and this week The Guardian looked at whether teachers were at risk. The answer appears to be ‘no’ for two reasons, one abstract, one practical. The abstract is that teaching involves passion and performance, behaviours a robot can’t replicate. And the practical...teaching involves a myriad of activities that can’t be planned for from picking a child up off the floor to covering for a colleague; also things a machine can’t do. The article is [here](#)
- Progression Gap. Some interesting research this week from Education Datalab on an area that has previously perhaps lacked a substantive evidence base, namely choice and opportunity at age 16. How much for instance do progression opportunities at age 16 depend on background and locality, do some students with similar abilities miss out? Deeper analysis of this so - called progression gap has been made possible by the coming together of three hefty databases: the National Pupil Database; Individual Learner Records; and HE Statistics Data which can provide important information on outcomes and progression in a way that wasn’t accessible before. Progression analysis at age 16 is likely to become a whole lot more informed in future

Quote(s) of the week

- “My advisers don’t tell me what to watch on the television, I watch what I want to watch” – the Prime Minister lists her Christmas TV favourites including Dr Who and Agatha Christie
- “Now may be the time of the famous or fortunate but what of the frustrated or frightened” – the Governor of the Bank of England tackles what’s turning out to be a difficult decade in a Lecture at John Moores University



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- “Lies, damned lies, statistics and, we can now add, performance indicators” – Professor Peter Scott tackles the current obsession with performance and measurement
- “Now is the time to find that tree and climb it exactly so we can begin to see further into the distance” – an American Professor reflects on how to tackle life under a Trump Presidency
- “It’s not about hard or soft subjects but the right ones” – the Russell Group of Universities highlight the importance of choosing the right subjects for HE and beyond
- “Perhaps the government could try listening to its own education experts instead” – the Director of NAHT Edge adds his thoughts to the PISA results
- “The idea that you simply sparkle some magic dust from grammars to other schools and the latter will automatically improve is crazy” – Warwick Mansell reports from the schools front line as the Green Paper consultation draws to a close

Number(s) of the week

- 1.3%. The fall in UK industrial production in October, the latest month for which there are figures and the third in a row which has witnessed a fall, suggesting a ‘disappointing’ 1.1% drop in industrial output for the year as a whole, according to latest ONS figures
- 7.4m. The number of people in the UK living in poverty despite being part of a working family, according to the latest report on poverty from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- 865,000. The estimated numbers of agency workers in the UK today (likely to grow to more than a million by 2020) according to the think tank the Resolution Foundation
- 5. The number of medals achieved by Team UK in the EuroSkills competition
- £1bn. The amount of money that is wasted each year as a result of drop outs from school sixth forms, according to the President of the Association of Colleges (AoC)
- 15, 21, 27. UK’s positions for Science, Reading and Maths respectively in the latest PISA global rankings
- 4.7. The number of hours a week the average KS4 student in the UK spends in science lessons in school compared to an average 3.5 hours across the OECD according to the latest PISA report
- £250m. How much a 1% pay rise for teachers would cost schools according to the government’s evidence to the School Teachers’ Review Body
- 456,900. The number of full time equivalent teachers in England as of November 2015 according to data in the STRB
- 10,000. The number of free school places private schools are prepared to offer low-income families as long as the government also contributes to the cost
- 88%. The number of people surveyed who trust teachers, compared to 15% who trust politicians in a poll commissioned by Mumsnet and conducted by Ipsos Mori
- 2 ½ hours. The amount of time that online shoppers will spend on average sorting out a delivery problem (doesn’t turn up, delivered to wrong address) this Christmas, according to Citizens’ Advice

What to look out for next week

- Consultation on the Schools Green Paper closes (Monday)



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- Education Policy Institute report on Grammar Schools and Social Mobility (Monday)
- Education Committee evidence session on primary assessment (Wednesday)
- UCAS 'End of Cycle' Report on 2016 uni entry (Thursday)
- A Green Paper on the Industrial Strategy and a 2nd consultation on schools funding both promised before Christmas