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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 16 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 mass of information this week as the traditional Christmas rush of documents got under way. Announcements on school funding, responses to the schools system consultation, a report on this year's university entry trends, a series of reports from the regulator on this year's exams and the latest league tables for primary schools, have all followed in quick succession. All these and more are listed below but for the intrepid traveller, a few pointers along the way might help.

School funding first where the government announced some broadly welcomed changes to early years funding, the Education Secretary launched the long – awaited second stage consultation on a schools national funding formula and the National Audit Office (NAO) rang a few alarm bells on schools funding generally. The NAO report provided important context arguing that state schools will have to find £3.0bn of savings by 2019/20 to counteract what it termed 'cumulative cost pressures' such as increases in resource costs, pay and pensions. There's a lot of useful data in the report but one sentence stands out: "schools have not experienced this level of reduction in spending power since the mid - 1990s."

Will the government's school funding reform which includes high needs and is introduced in transitional form from 2018/19, help? The Education Secretary in a Statement announcing further consultation, reckoned over 10,000 schools would end up getting more though others, notably in cities like London could get less. The Secretary of State was keen to stress the number of shields and protections being built in including a cap on any losses and retention of the minimum funding guarantee but the package comes with expectations of efficiencies which as the NAO report indicated, schools may find difficult to deliver.

Still on schools, consultation on the government's controversial Green Paper, the one with proposals for more selective education, drew to a close at the start of the week. The Education Policy Institute marked the occasion with another cameo dismantling much of the government's case. It was a theme adopted in most responses according to Schools Week which provided a helpful summary of some of the leading responses. For anyone looking for a wider perspective, the response from Lord O'Shaughnessy, former adviser to David Cameron, made interesting reading and can be found [here](#).

On to higher education where UCAS's annual summary of university applications and entry always makes interesting reading. In many ways, the picture it paints of rising numbers but continuing participation gaps, is a familiar one but as Mary Curnock Cook hinted in her final introduction as Chief Exec, a mood of change is gathering pace making the analysis in this report important reading.

As a quick overview, that's pretty much how it's looking at the end of this week, let alone this year. Some year, but thank you so much for reading all the same.

**Policy Eye**

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# Pearson

## Top headlines this week

- 'New grammars benefit to just six areas.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Exam malpractice by school staff up by 48%.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Schools face cuts of £3bn says watchdog.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Ignore school league tables, head teachers urge parents.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Number of challenges to GCSE and A' level marks falls by quarter.' ([Friday](#)).

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- **School funding.** The Education Secretary launched the second stage of a consultation on a national funding formula for schools intended to be implemented after a transitional year in 2018/19 and with the aim of ensuring a fairer balance of funding across the country
- **Early years funding.** The government issued its response to the recent consultation on early years funding by confirming an uplift in hourly funding rates, use of the new national formula to deliver its commitment of 30 hours of free childcare for working parents and the introduction of a new Disability Access Fund
- **Hands together over mental health.** The Education Committee and Health Committee announced that they would join forces for a short inquiry early next year into how education institutions can best support young people at risk of mental health problems
- **The wheels stay on.** The Brexit Minister and others held a roundtable with members of the UK automotive industry to discuss ways of ensuring that the sector can continue to thrive post – Brexit
- **Connected Future.** The National Infrastructure Commission reported on how things were going in the development towards integrated 5G networks due to be operative from 2020 on, arguing that we were already lagging behind other countries in 4G coverage, and calling for a big shove from government as a result
- **Digital Citizens.** The think tank Demos reported on its project running in a number of secondary schools as part of the Prevent programme that's helping young people counter growing threats of extremism by developing 'resilient digital citizenship skills'.

### HE

- **End of Cycle report.** UCAS published its annual 'End of Cycle' report on undergraduate entry to UK universities this year showing a record number entering higher ed in 2016 but continuing gaps in terms of entry between the less well - off and the better off
- **Second Reading.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a useful blog of some of the arguments made as the HE Bill reached its 2nd Reading stage in the House of Lords
- **OfS fee menus.** The government released initial consultation on how provider registration and other fee arrangements might operate under the new Office for Students (OfS)
- **Does it hurt?** The government reported on whether raising fees in line with inflation might have any impact on different groups and concluded that NHS loans apart, any impact would be limited



# Pearson

- **Strip them of their fees.** The Social Mobility Commissioner called on the government to develop social mobility league tables for universities and strip those universities that fail to admit disadvantaged students of the right to charge higher fees, in a speech in London
- **Made in Bristol.** Bristol University, one of the leading Russell Group members, announced it was intending to offer places with lower grades to locally disadvantaged students in lowest achieving schools, in an effort to encourage more local students from deprived backgrounds to apply.

## FE/Skills

- **New Year resolutions.** Ian Pretty, Chief Exec of the Collab Group, listed some key strategic objectives for the Group for 2017 in a new video blog including a focus on policy, Brexit, local growth plans, commercial activity and supporting the government's productivity plans
- **Business Challenge.** Former Business Secretary Vince Cable published an article in The Engineer setting out some of the challenges facing the government as it develops its industrial strategy including poor technical education, low maths levels, concerns about visas and foreign recruitment
- **Save our AGQs.** Bill Watkin, Chief Exec of the Sixth Form Colleges Association made a plea to protect BTECs and other applied general qualifications (AGQs) ahead of a review promised in the Skills Plan
- **Small sixth forms.** The Chief Exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC) re-iterated his call for a government review of the costs and impact of small sixth forms given the financial pressures on schools highlighted in the Audit Office report
- **You're worth it.** The DfE published latest average earnings figures for apprenticeships once in work showing particular increases for those with higher levels
- **Nurse apprenticeships.** The careers magazine 'Moving On' published a helpful 'what you need to know' about the recently announced nurse apprenticeships that are due to start next year.

## Schools

- **Tightening the belt.** The National Audit Office highlighted the growing pressures on schools funding and the prospects of long-term cuts as it published a critical report into the government's handling of schools funding
- **Grammar Schools and Social Mobility.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) published a follow – up report, dismantling some of the government's arguments for expanding selective school places and applying quotas, as formal consultation drew to a close
- **Smooth operation.** Ofqual published a series of reports on how this year's summer exams had gone from gestation to final reviews concluding that despite some obvious tensions and pressures, things had gone 'smoothly in general'
- **Glass half full or half empty?** Former Education Minister David Laws offered his thoughts on the state of education in Britain following the recent PISA results concluding we're doing well but not well enough yet to be considered a global leader
- **Dear Justine.** A group of non - selective secondary head teachers in Kent followed colleagues in Surrey by writing to the PM and Education Secretary expressing their concerns about any further spread of selective schooling in their patch



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- **Assisted places.** Sally Power, Director of the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, re-acted to the government's latest attempt to ensure independent schools offer some places to disadvantaged pupils by reflecting on the last such scheme, the Assisted Places Scheme, which in her view had 'a chequered history'
- **Primary Assessment.** Schools Week offered a helpful summary of some of the issues discussed as the Education Committee held its first witness sessions on primary assessment
- **Primary performance.** The government published finalised data on primary school performance this year showing that despite the introduction of more demanding tests, fewer schools had fallen below the government's floor standard compared to last year although significant gender, ethnic and socio – economic gaps still remained across the country.

## Tweet(s) of the week

- "Universities are struggling to win the debate on international students because they are preaching to the choir" - [@Wonkhe](#)
- "If you admit children to uni on lower grades solely because of poverty, you are saying I expect less from you because you are poor" - [@tombennett71](#)
- "@tombennett71: A child who get an A\* at a terrible Hull school has done exactly as well as a child at Mossbourne. Discuss" - [@Xtophercook](#)
- "Remember that no one remembers: there is no history in Whitehall, says a former ministerial adviser" - [@timeshighered](#)
- "More young people are watching Planet Earth 11 than X factor" - [@Independent](#).

## Word or phrase(s) of the week

- **Cubetto.** For the uninitiated of us, Cubetto is, according to the publicity blurb, "a friendly wooden robot that will teach your child the basics of computer programming through adventure and hands-on play." It's one of those education/tech toys along with Kano that are proving popular this Christmas though perhaps not always with the children. The FT tested out some of these toys this week and offered a mixed reaction to parents of budding Zuckerbergs looking to buy such presents. The article is [here](#)
- **Generation Z.** Gen Z as they tend to be called by those in the know are post – millennials, those born after 2000, who are starting to grow up and inevitably being subjected to considerable social analysis. The most striking aspect of Gen Z is that they've never known a world without social media; latest research suggests they spend at least 3 hours a day online and are helping transform connectivity in lots of different ways. On the plus side, they are wised – up in a way previous generations perhaps haven't been, often politically engaged and thoughtful about health and social issues. On the minus side, they tend to be more anxious, more stressed and despite social media, often feel more isolated. If you want to know more, [this site](#) is one of many providing up to date analysis of the Group.

## Quote(s) of the week

- "We want to move towards a 'hard' national funding formula that distributes the vast majority of funding directly to schools" – the Education Secretary adopts Brexit language as she announces the latest school funding consultation



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- “Even a hint that students are unwelcome and they will go elsewhere” – a University Vice- Chancellor reacts to rumours that the Home Office is considering further cuts to international student numbers
- “We are planning to publish a summary of the key findings in due course” – the HE Minister confirms the government will publish the findings from its consultation on accelerated courses in HE and switching course or university, in due course whenever that is
- “At the current rates of progress it would take over 50 years before the gap in access to university is closed between the areas with the lowest and highest participation rates” – the Social Mobility Commissioner considers the long road towards widening participation in HE
- “When I took over at UCAS in 2010, students chased places – now the places chase them” – Mary Curnock Cook reflects on how things have changed during her tenure as UCAS Chief Exec
- “I understand that the Public Accounts Committee is due to hold a session with dept officials early in the new year on the financial sustainability of schools” – the Chair of the Education Committee writes to the Schools Minister as the parlous state of school finances deepens
- “My children start here significantly below the national average and they leave significantly above it. So something is going on in this school” – the head teacher of Forest Gate Community School in East London, praised by Ofsted for its outstanding turnaround, rightly identifies something happening in his school
- “This data is not worth the paper it is written on” – the NAHT’s Russell Hobby issues a warning about this year’s primary school performance tables
- “There are too many digital deserts across the country and the availability of our 4G network is worse than many countries including Albania, Panama and Peru” – the National Infrastructure Commission finds gaps in the 4G network
- “Persistent disruptive behaviour remains the most common reason for both permanent and fixed period exclusions” – the government analyses the latest data on pupil exclusions which shows a slight increase
- “A nativity is a bit tame, even if it’s a fresh take on a nativity. They (children) relate more to something that’s like a talent show” – The Daily Telegraph investigates the changing face of the school nativity play.

## Number(s) of the week

- 1.62m. The latest unemployment figure for the UK as of the end of October, down slightly and with some evidence of a general ‘flattening’ in the labour market according to the ONS
- 2.1%. The final growth forecast figure for 2016 according to the British Chambers of Commerce, up from its earlier forecast of 1.8% for the year but with warnings of slower growth in the years to come
- 535,200. The total number of students entering HE this year, the highest number recorded according to the latest UCAS figures
- 74%. The number of respondees to the initial school funding consultation who backed the reform principles
- 10,740. The number of schools likely to gain from the proposed new funding formula (against a potential 5,000+ who may see their funding fall)
- £3bn. The estimated amount of savings schools will need to find by 2019/20 according to the National Audit Office

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# Pearson

- £41bn. The local authority gross spend on schools, education and children and young people's services for 2015/16 (a reduction of £0.7bn on the previous year) according to latest DfE figures
- 6. The number of local authorities, out of a total of 152, that would meet key location and public support principles for expanding selective school places according to the Education Policy Institute
- 15.4m. The number of exam scripts generated as part of this summer's exams according to the latest data from Ofqual
- 18%. The number of GCSE/GCE exam grades changed on appeal this year, slightly down on the year before, according to the latest Ofqual data
- 56%. The number of penalties issued to staff giving 'inappropriate assistance' to GCSE and A' level candidates in this summer's exams according to data from Ofqual
- 665. The number of primary schools which fell below the government's tougher accountability standards this year, slightly down on the previous year
- 4. The number of UK teachers included in the shortlist for the prestigious Global Teacher Prize.

## What to look out for next week

- A Green Paper on the Industrial Strategy promised before Christmas