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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 2 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

How are we doing?

It's been one of those weeks when we've had a series of reports on how the English education and skills system is doing. They include Ofsted's Annual Report on the School and College system, the international report on trends in maths and science (TIMSS,) a report from NFER on the evolving school system, a report from the Public Accounts Committee on apprenticeship developments and a series of reports on the first two waves of area reforms in FE. As to what it all says about how we're doing, a lot depends on whether you see the glass half full or half empty but either way there's a lot to welcome. Here's a few details.

Sir Michael Wilshaw's valedictory Annual Report first, a mixture of the forthright and the reflective and highlighting some familiar issues but ultimately leaving things on the up. Potentially one sentence in the 150 page report sums the picture up: "For children under the age of 11, truly high standards have almost been achieved. Over the age of 11, there is still much to be done." So early years and primary continue to perform well though assessment and secondary transition remain issues for the latter. For secondary, regional variations remain, particularly between the N.W, Midlands and the rest of the country; for FE, there are concerns about study programmes, L2 and below provision and some technical provision. Apprenticeship provision is improving but more needs doing while some SEN provision is weak.

As to specific issues, some familiar ones remain, notably regional gaps in attainment and the importance of leadership but a few others received notable prominence this year including: teacher recruitment especially at secondary; the importance of social cohesion in schools; English and maths resits and the case for alternatives; the enormity of changes going on around the FE system; and the need to seize the opportunity to create a genuine dual system (of academic and technical learning) for young people. And the Chief Inspector's parting shot to government: 'worry less about structures and more about capacity.'

What about those trends in maths and science published earlier this week? These are a set of global assessments in maths and science undertaken by 10 and 14 year olds, in this case across 57 countries. They happen every four years and have done so since 1995 so provide a valuable profile of performance over a period of time. Here too, the story is one of gradual improvement in performance by pupils in England; we're in the second highest performing group of countries although improved competitor performance means our international rankings haven't changed a great deal. There's some useful data in the report for schools helpfully summarised in a report by colleagues at the Institute of Education and listed below.

Next week of course, we have the latest PISA results, completing the picture on school performance for the moment although the spotlight never dims for long.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Heads call for law change to boost funding for disadvantaged pupils.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Singapore tops global education rankings.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Primaries are now becoming academies faster than secondaries.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'School performance link to Brexit vote.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'DfE abandons National Teaching Service.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Ofsted Annual Report](#). Ofsted published its 2015/16 Annual Report, its final one under Sir Michael Wilshaw highlighting as indicated in this week's introduction, an improving picture but with continuing concerns about regional attainment gaps, some SEN provision, technical education and English/maths resits
- [Corporate governance](#). The government launched its expected consultation paper on business governance, seeking views on three particular areas: executive pay; employee and customer voice; and corporate governance among large private companies
- [STEM skills gaps](#). The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee launched a new inquiry into STEM skill shortages with a call for evidence to run until January 13 2017
- [Getting the gig](#). The Taylor Review into modern employment practices, where growing numbers are now working in p/t, flexi-modes, got under way with the launch of a research project and a regional fact finding tour
- [Unlocking regional growth](#). The CBI highlighted the education attainment and skills of young people along with transport links, improved management practices and innovation, as one of four major ways in which regional productivity could be improved
- [Troubled Teens](#). The Children's Society reported on the often difficult relationship between parenting support and parenting neglect noting that while it was a difficult balancing act, many (15%) teenagers experienced parental neglect at a critical stage in their lives and schooling

HE

- [Where are they now?](#) The government published further 'experimental' data on graduate employment and earnings one, three and five years after graduation showing Biological Sciences and Medicine/Dentistry with the highest returns but raising some concerns in the sector about the use of such data as a performance metric
- [Consider these please](#). Nick Hillman, Director at the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) wrote an open letter to members of the Lords asking them to consider a number of issues including: letting students know how their fees are spent, tightening loan repayment arrangements and encouraging more innovative provision, as the HE Bill entered the discussion stage in the Lords

FE/Skills

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- [Area Review Reports](#). The DfE published a series of reports from the first two waves of reviews revealing issues tackled and recommendations for action made in each case
- [Another apprenticeships report](#). The Public Accounts Committee published the results of its inquiry into apprenticeship developments calling among other things for the government to report back on progress to new standards, keep an eye on the levy and develop new success metrics
- [Call for Nurse](#). The Health Secretary announced the creation of a new degree apprenticeship route for nurses, starting next Sept along with nursing associate apprenticeships
- [Career Colleges](#). Luke Johnson, chairman of Career Colleges, reported on a recent survey of 14 – 19 year olds which highlighted the importance of work preparation courses in the college sector in the face of growing concerns about future skills shortages

Schools

- [TIMSS](#). The latest international maths and science assessments saw 10 and 14 year olds in England performing creditably but our overall global rankings hardly changing as a result of improved performance by competitor countries
- [School improvement](#). A week after a ‘disappointing’ Autumn Statement, the Education Secretary announced targeted funding for school improvement, £50m through Local Authorities for supporting poorly-performing schools and £140m for school improvement in academies and state schools
- [GCSE grading guidance](#). Ofqual launched a consultation on the wording of the new requirements and conditions that will be needed to implement the new 9 – 1 grading scale for GCSE
- [A’ level update](#). The government confirmed that A’ level history of art and AS/A’ statistics will now continue to be offered (by Pearson) from next Sept and further work will be done generally to provide for modern languages with smaller cohorts from Sept 2018
- [Mashing the myths](#). Ofsted’s Sean Harford tackled the issue of marking and whether Ofsted expect a particular style or approach (it doesn’t) in his latest blog
- [The changing school system](#). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published its latest update on how academisation is changing the face of the school system not only region by region but also within regions
- [Academies by number](#). The DfE published its latest (2014/15) annual report on how the academy and free school system is shaping up with a range of data on sponsors, partners, conversions, performance, financial health and other profile issues
- [In good faith](#). The Education Policy Institute published its latest report, in this case questioning the government’s Green Paper proposals that allowing faith schools to take on more students would raise performance levels
- [More on careers](#). The Education Endowment Foundation, Bank of America Merrill Lynch and the Careers and Enterprise Co announced they were joining forces to evaluate different aspects of careers provision from apps to work experience, to see what works best
- [PSHE please](#). The Chairs of five Parliamentary Committees wrote to the Education Secretary calling on her to consider giving statutory status to PSHE particularly in light of the current Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) Private Members’ Bill currently before Parliament



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- [Lessons in the making](#). The TES offered nine lessons that could be learnt from Ed Balls's demise from Strictly including the importance of enthusiasm and how to receive feedback
- [Christmas challenge](#). MathsBank which provides resources for A' level maths, published a maths Advent Calendar with different maths challenges each day in the run-up to Christmas. Today's, Day 2 for those in the Christmas spirit, involved a poisson distribution resulting from presents being distributed incorrectly

Tweet(s) of the week

- "@tombennett71: is the #MannequinChallenge to behavior what sleeping lions was to my Reception Class back in the day?" - [@Magda_Wood](#)
- "Lord Nash: 'a tipping point' towards academisation will be reached in the next 5 or 6 years" [@tes](#)
- "From [@ChrisParrTHE](#): university unveils 'decision theatre.' Different from its 'huddle space.' Best eggs for description of 'spaces' please" - [@timeshigered](#)
- "Fortunately I never recovered from my education, I just carried on with it" - [@mrianleslie](#)
- "The first priority of the DfE is to make sure we have enough teachers. Sir Michael Wilshaw on [@BBCr4](#) today" - [@NAHTnews](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- How to be a clever country. Following the release of the TIMSS global rankings this week which showed some familiar countries near the top, the BBC's Education correspondent Sean Coughlan offered a wry look at how to be the top clever clogs country. He identified ten factors from: wanting it more to doing what you're told. The article is [here](#)
- The Just About Managing. We've heard a lot about the just about managing (JAM) group recently and this week the polling group YouGov reported on some recent research it had conducted into this new grouping. Broadly, 37% would describe themselves as just about managing financially, that's roughly 18.5m British adults and most are aged between 25 and 49 and with a household income between £10,000 and £30,000. The research is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "I don't know, there were so many" – Michael Gove holds his hands up to making a few mistakes during his tenure as Education Secretary
- "It is therefore with great pleasure that five years later, I can report that our education system has done better" – Sir Michael Wilshaw begins the commentary of his latest and final Annual Report
- "The programme involves more than just increasing apprentice numbers but this is the only outcome the DfE is monitoring" – the Public Accounts Committee reminds government that it's not just about the numbers
- "Growth in primary academisation in 2016 has exceeded secondary growth at the national level for the first time since the Academies Act was passed in 2010" – NFER highlight a new tipping point in academisation in their latest report



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- “Respectable” – assessment expert Professor Robert Coe offers his verdict on England’s performance in the latest global science and maths assessments
- “No government of any complexion, no think tank of any hue and no university education dept of any description has come up with a solution to the conundrum” – Sir Anthony Seldon highlights the challenge behind improving social mobility
- “About this time last year, I took the morning off work to watch my son don a crown and pull baby Jesus’s pants down” – with the annual Nativity play season upon us, commentators offer their thoughts about the value of the whole experience

Number(s) of the week

- 1.2%. The OECD revises up (from 1%) its growth forecast for the UK for 2017
- 90%, 78% and 71%. The number of good or outstanding primary and secondary schools and general FE colleges respectively according to Ofsted in its latest Annual Report
- 20,000. The number of apprentices working in the NHS (the government hopes to have 100,000 by 2020)
- 2,327. The total number of various applications to the initial Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers according to FE Week
- £190m. The amount of money the government is promising to support school improvement work
- 410,800. The number of agreed access arrangements for this year’s GCSE and A’ level exams, up 8% mainly in FE, according to recent data from Ofqual
- 29%. The number of state schools in England that are now Academies according to the NFER (up 4% on a year ago)
- £3.5m. The amount of money the Careers and Enterprise Co is putting into mentoring programmes with the aim of helping disengaged young people at KS4 in particular
- 580,000+. The number of students across 57 countries who took part in the latest TIMSS survey
- 97%. The number of primary school teachers who agree that they need to prepare kids for a digital future (but only 41% feel content in their IT skills according to recent research from BT and Ipsos Mori)
- 54. The number of teachers said to have been recruited to the National Teaching Service (announced earlier by Nicky Morgan) leading the scheme to be scrapped
- 30,000+. The number of children in England and Wales missing from school for large chunks of time in 2014/15 according figures obtained by the BBC
- £753. How much the average British household expects to spend on Christmas festivities this year according to the Go.compare website

What to look out for next week

- Learning and Work Institute Youth Employment Convention (Monday)
- PISA 2015 test results published (Tuesday)
- Skills Commission report on FE (Thursday)