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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 22 July 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

Tweet of the week surely belongs to the Prime Minister's husband who after a week of unbridled sunshine suggested that the onset of his wife's premiership might have something to do with the changed conditions. The full tweet is listed below.

It's been if not sunshine certainly not all clouds on the economic front this week with forecasts from the IMF and PWC, a report from the Bank of England and the publication of the latest official employment stats, all variously pointing to what one editorial described as 'an outbreak of normality' after the Referendum. The IMF was perhaps the most gloomy predicting a slowdown in UK growth to 1.7% this year and 1.3% next year, others have been more sanguine.

All of which underlines the current emphasis on productivity and skills. It featured in Theresa May's first Cabinet: "we will not allow the country to be defined by Brexit but instead build the education, skills, and social mobility to allow everyone to prosper from the opportunities of leaving the EU." And it featured heavily in the annual CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey published this week.

Talking of education, the looming summer break has brought the traditional rush to get business completed. MPs, for example don't return until 5 September. This week has therefore been characterised by a deluge of reports, 17 in all, a statement on schools funding and the 2nd Reading of the HE Bill. Links to all these are provided below but some headline features are worth noting.

On Schools funding, the Education Secretary has confirmed no reduction in Local Authority allocations for next year, a response to the schools funding consultation this autumn but the introduction of the new funding formula put back a year to 2018. On the HE Bill, MPs were in short supply but core issues including regulation, access, alternative providers, fee increases and student protection were all raised highlighting what's likely to dominate the Committee Stage. Finally, those reports which have covered university entry, digital developments, intergenerational issues and closing the attainment gap in schools. In each case, the follow-up work is likely to set the agenda for this autumn.

And one other rather quirky final thought. Years ending in the number 6 have provoked some of the most significant education reforms over recent years. For instance, 1976 brought Jim Callaghan's Ruskin speech and ensuing Great Debate; 1986 brought new qualifications-GCSE; 1996 brought Lord Dearing's major review of 16-19 qualifications; and 2006 brought Lord Leitch's seminal Skills report. What will 2016 bring?



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Top headlines this week

- 'Justine Greening 'open minded' about new grammar schools in England.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Employers warn of widening skills shortage.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'HE Bill passes 2nd Reading as Greening makes case for reforms.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Early university ambitions pay off, survey suggests.' ([Thursday](#))
- "Nearly half of new FE teachers can't find a job." ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Getting skills right](#). The CBI/Pearson annual employers' survey, completed before the Referendum, was published with employer concerns about the apprenticeship levy, the growing demand for high level skills and continuing interest in young people's work attitudes and readiness, all prominent
- [Qualification market trends](#). Ofqual issued its annual report on trends in the qualifications market in England, Wales and N. Ireland for 2014/15 showing a slight drop in the number of registered Awarding Organisations and available qualifications for the year
- [And the economic outlook is?](#) PWC published its latest economic outlook on life after the Referendum, pointing to economic growth slowing as business investment cooled, consumer spending holding up, house price growth decelerating but potential job opportunities growing in the North of the country,
- [And the lessons learned?](#) George Osborne outlined three key principles (the need for a strong economy, compassionate Conservatism, and an international outlook) that had guided him during his years as Chancellor when he gave the Margaret Thatcher Lecture at the Centre for Policy Studies this week
- [Digital delays](#). The BIS Committee published its report on the Digital Economy adding its voice to other recent reports castigating the government for the delay in releasing its Digital Strategy and highlighting a number of skill and regulatory issues that have become more pertinent post Referendum
- [Getting connected](#). The Culture, Media and Sports Committee published its report on how plans for establishing world-class connectivity were going concluding that the initial target of 90% coverage for superfast broadband had been met but that some hard to reach areas had been left out, fibre connectivity was poor and questions still remained about Openreach's costs and plans
- [The new poor](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed to some 'remarkable' changes in patterns of low income in a new report on living standards and inequality in the UK showing that the 'new poor' tend to live in households where at least one person is working but where income levels and opportunities remain weak
- [Millennial malaise](#). The Resolution Foundation announced a new commission to examine growing inequality between the generations as it published a report showing that the millennials (roughly those aged between 18 and 35) are facing a poorer socio-economic prospect than their predecessors
- [It's not just academic](#). Seven leading Royal Societies and academies including the British Academy, Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering published an open letter expressing concerns about the future of research and innovation following the Referendum and calling on the government to help maintain the UK's leading position in these areas



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- [Post Referendum migration](#). The Social Market Foundation think tank published a briefing offering one of the first analyses of the impact of the Leave vote on migration suggesting that even without the Referendum, net migration would fall largely because of a deteriorating economic outlook
- [Unleashing Greatness](#). The World Economic Forum released a new report, co-hosted by Michael Barber and Joel Klein, setting out nine principles that can help spark innovation in education
- [Leaving no one behind](#). Parliament's International Development Committee announced a new Inquiry into the impact of DFID's work on education and whether any particular countries or groups of learners were being left behind

HE

- [HE Bill progress](#). Following a lengthy and wide-ranging debate, the government's HE and Research Bill completed its Second Reading passing by 36 votes but with signs that issues like fees, regulation, access, research and EU positioning are all likely to be raised in later stages. The [THES](#) and [Wonkhe](#) both have helpful summaries of the debate
- [Through the eyes of students](#). UCAS reported on its survey of 2015 applicants noting that many perceptions about HE still hold among young people but that early aspirations help
- [University Funding Explained](#). Universities UK published a report doing what it says on the tin
- [What's holding back the boys](#). The think tank LKMco added its voice about the poor participation rates in HE by white working-class boys with a new report highlighting some of the barriers facing this group including lack of guidance and support, difficulties with application forms and lack of role models
- [Widening participation](#). University College Oxford announced a new Opportunity Programme due to launch for the 2016/17 admissions round whereby additional places would be filled by recruits from disadvantaged backgrounds
- [Freezing the threshold](#). Campaigners arguing against the government's retrospective decision to freeze the threshold for the repayment of student loans have vowed to fight on after a Westminster Hall debate this week aired the issues but produced no change from the government
- [MOOCs abroad](#). The BBC reported on the developing nature of massive online open courses (MOOCs) noting their spread to international and niche markets

FE/Skills

- [End –point Assessments](#). Ofqual set out how it would regulate end-point assessments (EPA) for apprenticeships if called on to provide external quality assurance
- [Revolving roles](#). The Learning and Work Institute announced that current deputy, Stephen Evans, would take over as Chief Exec of the Learning and Work Institute in Sept when David Hughes leaves to take over as CEO of the Association of Colleges
- [Autumn days](#). Julian Gravatt, the AoC's Assistant Chief Executive, looked ahead (briefly) to the Autumn Funding statement and urged the government to stick with its current investment in skills



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Schools

- **Formula delay.** The Education Secretary confirmed that current school funding arrangements, including the minimum funding guarantee, would remain for another year with specific allocations confirmed in December, meaning that the introduction of the new national formula would be put back a year to 2018
- **The EBacc effect.** The Sutton Trust reported on useful research conducted by Education Datalab looking at a group of schools who were early adopters of the EBacc concluding that while the EBacc helped raise performance levels particularly among disadvantaged students, it didn't mean that the government's target that 90% of students should take it was appropriate
- **Advancing Teaching.** The IPPR think tank published a commissioned report calling for a new Institute for Advanced Teaching, intended to raise the stature and professionalism of teaching and attracting potential partnership interest from some Teaching Schools and Academies
- **Progress Gap.** The Education Policy Institute examined the issue of the performance gap for disadvantaged pupils showing how its impact was evident in many cases at age five but that some schools, notably in poorer areas, managed to help close the gap by the end of primary
- **Tender gender gap.** Save the Children published a report showing that even at reception stage, boys, particularly in disadvantaged areas, were twice as likely to have fallen behind girls in their command and usage of language with potential long-term effects on their progress
- **Progress 8 explained.** Head teacher and ASCL Data Group member David Blow offered a useful 'blow-by-blow' summary of the Progress 8 performance measure which takes effect this year
- **Is the new Yr 6 maths test changing the way teachers teach?** Two academics at the London Institute argued that it was suggesting in a new blog that it was making teachers concentrate more on mastering level 5 number and calculation concepts than anything else as that's where most of the marks were

Tweet(s) of the week

- "Theresa's only been Prime Minister five days and she's already improved the weather" [@PMhusband](#)
- "For the first time in 15 years teaching, I'll be going to work in a short sleeved shirt. Imagine two pipe cleaners sellotaped to a grapefruit" - [@oldandrewuk](#)
- "One of the first things I did (as Education Secretary) was pick up the phone to the teaching unions" [@JustineGreening](#) tells the Commons - [@tes](#)
- "[@tombennett71](#). History: research the history of Pokemon. Geog: draw a map of where you found Pikachu. PE: sprint to Bulbasaur" - [@MrHistoire](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 'User interface,' 'pop-ups' and 'cookie.' The top three words in a list of coding terms that kids as young as three are apparently learning at school but baffling their less tech savvy parents with when they get home according to a recent report



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Quote(s) of the week

- “As my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, while the UK remains a member of the EU, current EU funding and collaboration arrangements continue unchanged, including those that apply to students, researchers and businesses” – the HE Minister responds to a question in Parliament on the impact of the Referendum vote on higher education
- “Millennials entering work have so far earned £8,000 less during their 20s than the generation before them” David Willetts helps launch the Resolution Foundation inquiry into intergenerational issues
- “We need to reset the barometer reading for progression to HE to a much earlier age- 10 or younger” – UCAS Chief Exec Mary Curnock Cook reflects on UCAS’s latest report on student perceptions
- “As it stands the levy system will work in Whitehall but it won’t work in Walsall, or any other part of the UK where business is training and developing people” – The Deputy DG of the CBI expresses concerns about the apprenticeship levy at the launch of the latest CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey
- “We will be asking the new minister to stick to the current levy timetable” – Mark Dawe, Chief Exec of the AELP issues an opening message to the new Skills Minister
- “I remain passionately committed to the Northern Powerhouse-and I won’t let go of that” – George Osborne confirms some continuing commitments
- “I hope she is open to the argument that a grammar and secondary modern school system is very unpopular with voters” – education commentator John Dunford offers his thoughts in the TES as the grammar school debate once again seizes headlines
- “I can predict a new fad to sweep the education community: a game called Pokemon Gove” – it had to happen

Number(s) of the week

- 1.6%. PWC’s prediction for UK growth for 2016 dropping to 0.6% for 2017 (against 3% in 2014 and earlier predictions of 2% for 2016. The IMF is forecasting growth of 1.3% for the UK for 2017)
- 4.9%. The UK unemployment figure (down from 5.6% from 12 months ago) in the latest pre Referendum stats covering March – May 2016
- 70%. How many employers since the Referendum vote have faced concerns from staff about their job security or right to remain, according to a survey by the professional HR body, the CIPD
- £9,250. What some universities are advertising their annual tuition fee will rise to from 2017
- 47%. How much of the teaching budget for universities in 2014/15 came from UK and EU undergraduate fees, according to UUK stats
- 384,500. The number of Apprenticeship starts in the first three quarters of 2015/16 according to the latest official stats
- 48%. How many 16+ year olds across the EU are enrolled on vocational programmes according to Eurostats (the UK comes in at slightly lower on 43%)
- 2.2 years. The average length of tenure for Education Secretaries in the post-war period according to John Dunford (Nicky Morgan fell just short at 2 years exactly)



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- 163. The number of Awarding Organisations accredited by Ofqual in 2014/15 (down 3 on the previous year) according to Ofqual's latest market report
- 90,000. How many boys started reception class last year struggling to speak a full sentence or follow simple instructions according to research conducted by Bristol University for Save the Children
- £121. The average weekly care costs per child according to the NSPCC who expressed concerns this week about cases of young children being left uncared for during the school holidays

What to look out for next week

- Teach First Impact Conference (Monday, Tuesday)
- Parliament in recess (until Sept 5)