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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 13 May 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

This week we've seen the latest session of Parliament draw to a close, more on SATs and MATs, an interesting report on life on the front line for many school leaders and governors and an escalation of interest in what next week's Queen's Speech might bring. A lot to cover but here's a few pointers on each.

Bidding farewell to the final session of the 2015/16 session of Parliament first. It may have a slim majority but the government has been keen to show it means business with 24 Bills passed over the year including some important ones for education. Coasting schools, apprenticeship targets, young people's training and devolution have all been the subject of fierce debate and featured prominently in four of the six Education related Bills. But the session has ended with the government facing considerable challenges as it seeks to push its education agenda forward and as someone tweeted this week, the PM needing to have a red re-think button on his desk.

SATs and MATs next, the two high-profile education topics at the moment. The latest SATs breach brought the Minister to the House to defend the testing regime and confirm the government's commitment to it. The ComRes and TES/Mumsnet/First News polls suggesting that kids can cope with testing perhaps better than feared may have reassured Ministers but the debate is likely to run at least to July when results are released.

As for MATs and the whole issue of the academisation programme, where the Secretary of State's announcement at the end of last week was aptly described by Laura McInerney as more of a Z- than a U- turn, there have been some excellent comment pieces on the matter this week. The general view is that, U- or Z- bends apart, the push towards wider academisation continues. For those with time, the comment pieces this week from [Bill Watkin](#), Chief Exec of the Sixth Form Colleges Association, [John Andrews](#) of the think tank CentreForum, [Warwick Mansell](#) in a blog for the NAHT and [James Croft](#) of the Centre for the Study of Market Reform offer helpful perspective.

Next that report from the frontline which comes from The Key who questioned nearly 2,000 school leaders and 1,000 governors for its annual State of Education survey report. The finding that nearly a half of new pupils in a third of primary schools were arriving lacking the skills or preparedness to benefit from school attracted considerable media headlines but it's worth noting that the school system remains pretty positive about how it manages things. Perhaps unsurprisingly, teacher recruitment and retention, workloads and funding remain as top concerns generally.

Finally next week and what might lie in store as the new legislative programme is announced. The government is being urged to return to and refresh its social reform roots but for education it's the prospects of an HE Bill that looms large. Wonkhe has the hopes and fears of some commentators [here](#).



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Top headlines this week

- 'Primary pupils feel test pressure-survey.' ([Monday](#))
- 'SATs test leaked by rogue marker.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'UK losing share of international student market.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'UK's university gender gap is a national scandal says think tank.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Mature graduates earn more and have better job prospects than their younger classmates.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Testing, testing](#). Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell writes to Nicky Morgan with a number of questions about SATs and related matters following the latest security breach
- [Finding the right route](#). The Resolution Foundation calls for a simplified system of career progression for the 'forgotten 40%', the 40% of the workforce with good GCSEs but not a degree, in a new report for the Social Mobility Commission
- [The State we're in](#). The Key organization questions over a thousand school leaders and governors for its latest 'State of Education' report and finds concerns about school funding, teacher recruitment and retention, and school-readiness looming large among the various concerns raised
- [It's all going digital](#). Lord Ken Baker sketches out the challenges for the education system posed by the digital revolution in a new publication for the Edge Foundation calling among other things for a more technically-orientated curriculum including more coding provision in primary, young apprenticeships from age 14 and a stronger technical route generally
- [Computers in the classroom](#). It sounds far-off and comes with caveats but a new report by the US Military adds to the debate about the use of laptops in learning by suggesting that Academy recruits that didn't use them performed better in terms of sample test scores than those that did
- [The Finnish model](#). An interesting article in The Economist looks at how Finland, historically seen as a high-performing education nation, struggles to re-invigorate a curriculum that tries to balance high standards with the joy of learning

HE

- [Boys to men](#). The HE Policy Institute highlights the issue of under recruitment and under achievement of young men in UKHE in a new report and calls for dedicated outreach work, greater institutional focus and potential foundation programmes to help redress the balance
- [Access Agreements](#). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) publishes its latest report on the impact of HE access agreements, in this case covering 2014-15, showing that 88% of the targets over the year had been met but that the policy push has become more intensive



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- [Destination Data](#). The Higher Ed Statistics Agency launches a lengthy and important consultation on the sort of graduate destination and outcome data needed for higher education in the future
- [Strike on](#). Threats of a strike by university lecturers move a step nearer with a walk-out over pay negotiations set for May 25/26

FE/Skills

- [National Colleges](#). The government confirms how much money will be allocated to each of the five National Colleges (in High Speed Rail, Nuclear, Onshore Oil and Gas, Digital Skills, and Creative and Cultural Industries) announced last year and due to formally open this Sept
- [New apprenticeship taskforce](#). Three government depts get together to sponsor a new taskforce aimed at helping more people with learning difficulties get opportunities to take up an apprenticeship
- [More apprentices and trainees](#). The Skills Funding Agency announces that it will aim to meet 'credible' growth requests to deliver more 16-18 and 19+ apprenticeships and traineeships if they meet defined criteria and are submitted by next Friday May 20

Schools

- [SATs](#). The Minister makes a statement to MPs following the latest breach confirming that the tests will continue and that the government remains committed to them despite a continued chorus of concerns
- [Academies debate](#). This has continued this week with the general view being that a) the drive for mass academisation will continue despite the recent statements and b) the use of motoring images (U-turns, handbrakes, reverse gears) will continue to define it.
- [MAT Inquiry](#). The Education Committee publishes the written evidence submitted to its multi-academy trust (MAT) inquiry due to begin next month
- [Health and efficiency](#). The National Association of School Business Managers offers guidance to schools on ways in which they could make savings of up to 20% with some suggestions such as cutting down on meetings perhaps more popular than those on the wider use of Teaching Assistants in classrooms
- [Cambridge Primary Reviews](#). The latest in the series of research briefings from the Trust has been published this week and looks at some of the challenges facing primary schools as they try to respond to pupil diversity
- [Spurred on](#). Spurs and Highgate School join forces to submit plans for a new sixth form Academy of Excellence to be based in Haringey, open in 2017 and provide for poorer families

Tweet(s) of the week

- "I'm in charge of worrying-teachers taking the stress out of SATs tests" - [@bbceducation](#)
- "Primary kids must be coming to the conclusion that adults are really rubbish at all this testing stuff" - [@miss_mcinerney](#)
- "Let us use apprenticeship levy to train vicars say Church of England" – [@stephenexley](#)



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- “A baby girl born in 2016 will be 75% more likely to go to university than a boy if trend continues” - [@HEPI_news](#)
- “Most national policy fails – but some local policy succeeds” - [@theRSAorg](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- ‘Right to disconnect.’ Something that may become law in France where the government is voting on the introduction of new ‘work-life’ charters for companies employing 50 people or more. It would mean things like logging on and dealing with emails out of hours could be banned although many companies appear to be adopting a more Gallic c’est la vie approach

Quote(s) of the week

- “She deserves applause not derision for her courageous change in direction” – Sir Anthony Seldon believes the Education Secretary deserves some credit for the change of gear in the government’s academy plans
- “Every single time you read the ending, you could hear a pin drop”- A teacher laments the last year in which ‘Of Mice and Men’ is required as a set text at GCSE
- “Please try your best to think of these tests as ‘something I’ve got to do but not the most important thing in the world’ “ – Mrs Irvine puts SATs into perspective in a letter to her Yr 6 pupils
- “Four year olds know how to swipe a phone but haven’t a clue about conversations” – The latest survey of school leaders by the Key organization highlights concerns about school-readiness
- “As a nation we have spectacularly failed to provide clear routes to four in ten of the UK’s workforce...those with good GCSEs who haven’t got a degree” – The Resolution Foundation highlights the so-called ‘forgotten 40%’ of the workforce
- “Don’t keep going to meetings every week to discuss things” – The National Association of Business Managers strike a chord as they list ways schools can save time and money
- “Introduce a ‘Take our Sons to University Day’” – One of the recommendations in HEPI’s new report on helping more young males achieve in higher education

Number(s) of the week

- 10%. The number of pupils who said they hated exams with 59% saying they felt nervous according to a survey of 10 and 11 year olds by researchers ComRes
- £725.4m. How much universities and colleges spent on access activities and support in 201/15 according to the latest report from OFFA
- £897m. The income from HE-Business Knowledge Exchange in 2014, up 6% according to the latest report from the National Centre for Universities and Business
- 9.2%. The gap between males and females in terms of university entry rates according to UCAS stats, up from 5.9% over the last decade
- £80m. How much funding is being made available for the five new National Colleges

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- 32. The number of colleges now in the 157 Group with Bridgewater College becoming the latest to join

What to look out for next week

- Learning at Work Week (Monday-Sunday)
- Mental Health Awareness Week (Monday-Sunday)
- IPPR seminar on the role of secondary schools in young people's mental health services (Tuesday)
- AoC Annual Finance Conference (Tues-Wed)
- Queen's Speech (Wednesday)
- Possible publication of an HE White Paper (Thursday)
- SMF 'Ask the Expert' seminar on the new national fair funding formula for schools (Thursday)