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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 6 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

SATs, Seldon and skills top the headlines this week.

SATs first, where the 2016 Key Stage 2 SATs get under way next week with the English papers on the first two days and the maths ones on the next two but where the build-up this year has been dominated by furious debate about the nature of the whole thing. Are these tests too hard for the kids, are they draining the fun out of learning, is the government, as the Shadow Education Secretary put it, “creating chaos and confusion in primary assessment?” The children’s author Michael Rosen, a long-time critic of the testing regime, has compared it all to testing the quality of petrol through the performance of a car, the NUT in its letter to the Education Secretary talked of the system being ‘fatally flawed.’

Standard assessment tests have attracted criticism since they were first introduced in 1991 but what has attracted such fierce criticism this year is partly the concern that these latest tests will be too demanding and partly a growing awareness of their impact on children’s mental health. If a Minister can get castigated for getting a question wrong, what about a youngster? Strong words have been said about those who took their offspring out of school for a day this week in protest at the tests and the government is standing its corner at present but perhaps the comment piece in the TES this week by Claire Fox, director of the Institute of Ideas, helps put things in perspective: “Yes some will pass, while others will fail but such distinctions are not harmful; they are part of the meritocratic way of ensuring those who are struggling get additional help, while those who do well can see the outcome of their learning.”

Moving on, Seldon refers to Sir Anthony Seldon, now ensconced as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Buckingham, and who as the government prepares to consult further on its proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) for HE, has published his own set of ideas in a pamphlet for the Social Market Foundation. It’s not just the timing of this pamphlet that’s interesting, it’s also the fact that the author represents a university that is being seen, in government circles at least, as an example of the sort of new HE provider it’s seeking. Broadly Sir Anthony is calling for a much greater emphasis to be placed by universities on the quality of their teaching, using a self-improving model of ten characteristics which he helpfully lists. He even tops it off with a 5-star system for top teachers.

Finally this week, skills where two items stand out. First, the Enterprise Bill, which has now reached the statute book where among other things it grants the Business Secretary new powers on setting apprenticeship targets for public bodies. And secondly as FE Week has been reporting this morning, another White Paper on skills appears to be looming which coupled with the current area wide reviews, could see significant changes to the way in which post-16 provision operates.



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## Top headlines this week

- 'SATs protest: parents keep children off school.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Primary schools test boycott draws scattered response.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Government must launch a royal commission into 'failing' state system, says private school head.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Skills White Paper to propose academic and vocational divide.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [HE loans for NHS students](#). Labour raises concerns as it hosts an Opposition Day debate on the replacement next year of NHS bursaries by a student loan system for students taking courses in nursing, midwifery and some other health areas The university think tank million + has a useful briefing Paper on the matter [here](#)
- [Going Global 2016](#). Cabinet Minister Matt Hancock flies the flag for the UK government at this year's Going Global Conference on further and higher education in South Africa, where he announces support for the DfID funded HE Strategic Partnerships Programme
- [UK manufacturing](#). CBI Director-General Carolyn Fairbairn calls for a modernized industrial strategy built around skill development, R/D and new energy sources to help boost the UK's manufacturing base
- [Mental health pilots](#). DfE Minister Sam Gyimah reports on progress made and what else the Dept is doing to support mental health services for children in a speech at the Anna Freud mental health charity

### HE

- [Teaching Quality](#). Sir Anthony Seldon confronts the issue of teaching quality in a new pamphlet for the Social Market Foundation in which he proposes a list of 10 characteristics of good teaching with a five-point grading scale for teachers
- [Differential fees](#). UCL's Dean Machin follows up the recent IfS report on the differing economic rates of return for graduates by proposing differential course fees to match in a comment piece in Wonkhe
- [Class of 2015](#). The Daily Telegraph returns to see how four young people who graduated last summer have fared finding jobs and places to live one year on, where the phrase 'reality check for all of us' seems to sum up the general consensus
- [Graduate numbers](#). A Guardian editorial looks at the rise in UK graduate numbers over the last 20 years or so and suggests more needs to be done to match skill outcomes to market needs
- [More world rankings](#). The UK has five universities in the Times Higher's World Reputation Rankings published this week but according to the editor is struggling to hold its global position as Asian Universities gain ground



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## FE/Skills

- **Apprenticeship targets.** The BIS Dept outlines the delegated powers available for the Secretary of State to prescribe apprenticeship targets for public bodies and other activities under the Enterprise Bill
- **Apprenticeship Levy.** The Manufacturer's Organisation EEF becomes the latest employers' body to call on the government to delay the introduction of the levy in the light of concerns raised by its members
- **VAT relief.** The All Party Parliamentary Group for Sixth Form Colleges writes to the Chancellor urging him to sort out the VAT implications of academy conversion which could see those Colleges where buildings have recently been completed facing a hefty repayment bill
- **UTC down.** The construction and engineering UTC in Burnley becomes the 4<sup>th</sup> University Technical College over the last year to announce closure following poor levels of student recruitment

## Schools

- **The Education Secretary spells it out.** Nicky Morgan argues that only about 1% of schools will be below the floor standard this year as she defends primary assessment along with academies, workload and other government reforms at last weekend's National Association of Head teachers' Conference
- **Off school.** The 'Let Our Kids Be Kids' Group urges parents to take their kids out of school for a day and do something recreational instead, as part of a protest against the new testing regime in primary
- **School Dash.** The education data crunchers, SchoolDash, follow up their analysis of the impact of academisation on secondary schools by doing the same for primaries and report a similar picture of good schools staying much the same but underperforming schools generally improving following a switch to academy status

## Tweet(s) of the week

- "Stress generated by competitive m/c parents. Sort who peek in book bags of kids' mates to see what level of Biff and Chip they're at"- [@hugorifkind](#)
- "Just asked the PM's spokeswoman if she or the PM knew what a split digraph was. She smiled and said primary tests are driving up standards" - [@paulwaugh](#)
- "The teacher's motto: To protect and educate. Which is why I don't believe in freaking kids out even if we are" - [@tombennett71](#)
- "In the digital age has Twitter become a new medium for academic vanity?" [@timeshighered](#)

## Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 'Subordinating conjunction.' A conjunction that joins a subordinate clause to a main one and in the case of the Minister who was caught out on it this week and KS2 pupils who may have to recognize it in the new KS2 tests, it's the word 'after' in the following sentence: "I went to the cinema after I'd eaten my dinner"



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## Quote(s) of the week

- “Reform overwrites reform like some palimpsest of hyperactive hyper-activity” – The General-Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) gets his tongue around the latest reforms in a speech to the recent NAHT Conference
- “You need to be aware that none of these changes has lessened the dissatisfaction of teachers with an untried system” – The NUT lets the Education Secretary know what they think about assessment in primary schools
- “She is supportive especially as a lot of her friends are meeting in Clissold Park to raise the profile of the protest” – A parent explains why her Yr 1 daughter boycotted school for one day this week
- “I called it as I saw it” – The DfE’s mental health champion is moved on while the government conducts a review of the role
- “And, privately, we all know that independent schools are the quiet beneficiaries of every failure in the school system” – A private school head speaks privately

## Number(s) of the week

- 80%. The number of submitted specs for new GCSEs, AS and A level from this Sept that have been accredited according to Ofqual’s latest update
- 75m. The number of children aged 3-18 living in war torn and crisis areas in the world who need educational support according to a new Unicef report
- 40,000. The number of people said to have signed a petition supporting a boycott of SATs at KS1
- 15,000. Roughly the number of state primary schools in England who’d need to convert to academy status over the next six years if the government’s current academy plans remain as they are
- 29%. The number of UK secondary schools who have adopted some form of BOYD (Bring your own devices) including iPads and smartphones according to techie supplier RM Education

## What to look out for next week

- Key Stage 2 SATs Week (Mon-Thurs)