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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 11 November 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

Some choppy waters this week, mainly over the Atlantic Ocean with the US election but also partly over the Indian Ocean as our own Prime Minister negotiated trade and visas on her first post-Brexit trade mission. It hasn't all been quiet on the education home front either as a glance down the listings below shows.

But overseas first, where of course one story dominates: Trump's election victory or America's primal scream as former White House adviser David Axelrod put it. An exhausting amount has been written about Donald Trump this week but where does he stand on education? According to the TES, he's not keen on shaking hands with teachers regarding them as 'germy' but this quote from his campaign in September is more enlightening: "if we can put a man on the moon, dig out the Panama Canal and win two world wars, then I have no doubt we can provide school choice to every disadvantaged child in America." School choice along with ending the common core are both included in his shopping list of actions for his first 100 days and as the Atlantic magazine puts it are likely to be behind his pro-charter, pro-voucher and anti-government interference approach to education. Time will tell but for the moment, he may be busy in court as he faces allegations from a couple of ex - Trump university students about being duped over their courses.

As for our own Prime Minister, she has been busy this week shaking the hands of both Indian and Chinese leaders. This is all part of a concerted effort to secure flourishing trade relationships post Brexit and a number of joint ventures have been signed but the issue of visas remains both for business and HE. Business is hoping that access to the Great Club (see below) may help. For HE, increasingly reliant on overseas fee income, things remain difficult. HEFCE's report this week indicates that the sector is looking to grow the number of non - EU overseas students by between 1.8% and 5.8% over the next four years with projected fee income rising to £4.7m, up from £3.5m in 2014/15. Many feel current visa rules aren't helping.

Back on the domestic education front, things have been gearing up for next week's annual FE and Skills fest with two think tank reports on apprenticeships, one calling for a dedicated pre-apprenticeship programme, the other for a much stronger emphasis on quality standards and outcomes. The policy push around apprenticeships is likely to feature prominently at next week's colleges' conference and the CBI employers' conference the week after.

Elsewhere, HE continues to be concerned about the impact of Brexit as HEFCE's latest annual financial health check of the sector and Aaron Porter's piece for Wonkhe indicate. For schools, there've been important reports this week on oracy, attainment gaps, exam entries, coasting school numbers and the Standards and Testing Agency. Not quite choppy waters but a few ripples in some cases.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Primary school votes to end homework.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Illegal schools harm vulnerable pupils, says Wilshaw.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'More than 800 schools set to be condemned as coasting.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Apprenticeships don't meet teen needs.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Schools could be 19,000 head teachers short by 2022.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Balancing the books](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies published its assessment of the UK's public finances ahead of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement suggesting that the Chancellor faces a difficult balancing act of promoting fiscal stimulus at a time when public finances are worsening
- [Trip to India](#). The Prime Minister announced a number of trade deals and joint science and research programs as part of her trade visit to India
- [Two Cinderella areas](#). The Chair of the Education Committee highlighted early years provision and technical provision as two key areas that could improve education performance and social mobility in a comment piece on the conservativehome website
- [Pre-apps](#). The think tank IPPR published a new report on apprenticeships calling on the government to scrap L2 apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds and replace them with a more distinctive pre-apprenticeship programme, incorporating off-the-job training as well as English and maths all mapped on to the 'Sainsbury' 15 technical routes
- [The skills we need](#). The think tank Policy Exchange also published a report on apprenticeships calling for a much greater focus on ensuring quality alongside quantity with a beefed up Institute for Apprentices and Technical Education handed a key role
- [A bridge too far?](#) The government responded to concerns about the rigid literacy and numeracy requirements expected of Early Years staff by launching a brief consultation on what future expectations should be

HE

- [In sickness and in health](#). HEFCE's latest annual report on the financial health of the HE sector showed a sector in reasonably sound financial health currently, albeit with a widening gap between the highest and lowest performing institutions, but increasing apprehension about the impact of Brexit on growth levels
- [Degree apprenticeships](#). HEFCE announced which universities and colleges had been successful (18 consortia and single institutions in all) in bidding for some of the £4.5m degree apprenticeship development funds for programmes starting in Sept 2017
- [Brexit effect](#). Aaron Porter published an interesting analysis in Wonkhe of some of the trends in global student recruitment in the context of Brexit, suggesting that student interest in UKHE remains strong
- [Tokyo Statement](#). The Russell Group joined universities from Germany, Australia, China and elsewhere in signing the 2016 Tokyo Statement designed to encourage global collaboration and support for Research Intensive Universities (RIUs)



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FE/Skills

- [Reading the small print](#). The Skills Funding agency published technical details, complete with a worked example, of how the funding system for apprenticeships will work for programmes from May 2017
- [Apprenticeship roundup](#). The Association of Learning Providers (AELP) published a helpful summary of the latest burst of apprenticeship developments listing its own position in each case
- [LEP assurance](#). The government updated its guidance to LEPs on how to operate within the National Assurance Framework particularly in terms of the local assurance, value for money and transparency needed for Growth Deals

Schools

- [Academy accounting](#). The Education Committee responded to the DfE's latest dry run model of monitoring and reporting on Academy finances following accounting issues this year, calling for further amendments to be made and a follow-up meeting with the Committee early in 2017
- [Carry on testing](#). The review into the Standards and Testing Agency concluded that the Agency could and should continue to deliver tests but equally that a number of areas including vision, strategy, culture and quality assurance needed improving and according to the Agency's response, are being tackled
- [Real world problems](#). Head teachers in Surrey posted a letter to the government opposing the introduction of any more selective education arguing that it deflected attention from other real problems citing three in particular: funding cuts; a teacher recruitment crisis; concerns about the new GCSE grading scale
- [Under surveillance](#). Big Brother Watch published a new report highlighting the challenges many schools face as they seek to make learning interactive while at the same time monitoring students' online use
- [Not waving but coasting](#). The DfE published provisional figures (see below under numbers of the week) for the number of schools likely to be collared under the new coasting criteria when the data is formally confirmed for KS2 in Dec and KS4 in January
- [Group differences](#). The Sutton Trust published research showing differences in attainment gaps in various ethnic groups with Bangladeshi, African and Chinese disadvantaged students showing particular improvement and in the case of Bangladeshi students, closing the gap to 9% as compared to 32% for white British teenagers
- [Who's passing the 11+?](#) Education Datalab examined 11+ test results in four selective areas from over the last five years and found that ethnic minority groups had greater levels of success than white pupils with similar SATs results, with different cultural attitudes to education arguably playing a part
- [The Parent Factor](#). The charity National Numeracy published a report supported by the Mayor's Fund for London showing that if you want to raise performance in maths, getting parents involved really helps
- [Don't forget oracy](#). LKMco and Voice 21 published a new report on oracy or speaking skills in schools finding that it was rather the forgotten middle child between literacy and numeracy and suggesting a number of ways in which its profile and support could be raised including the launch this week of a new Network



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- [More than a campfire](#). Researchers working on the National Child Development Study reported that people who joined the Scouts or Guides often had fewer mental health concerns as they got older largely because of the skills and resilience they developed during their time in these organisations

Tweet(s) of the week

- “Every school in the country should have a 3D printer says UTC founding father, Lord Baker” - [@tes](#)
- “Schools need to talk about their data rather than be talked at about their data” – [@CParkinson535](#)
- “If you enjoyed 2016, you’re going to love its sequel 2017, with 11, poss 12 European elections” - [@jessicaelgot](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- The Great Club. This was launched three years ago, ironically by Theresa May as the then Home Secretary, as a way of cutting through some of the bureaucracy around the visa and immigration system. Its aim was, and still is, to attract the best talent by offering a fast track visa service, an invitation only club card service perhaps. It was this bespoke model of visas services that Theresa May promised Indian business executives this week
- Coasting schools. It’s not a term that everyone is comfortable with but has now been formally ascribed in legislation and will apply for the first time this year. Briefly a school is identified as coasting if its performance falls below ‘par’ for three consecutive years. ‘Par’ for primary means fewer than 85% of KS2 pupils reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths and a low progress score generally and for secondary, fewer than 60% of KS4 pupils achieving 5 benchmark A* - Cs and has a low progress score generally. For full explanation see the document listed under Schools below. A school that falls into scope could be subject to intervention and possibly academy conversion. The Dept suggests 804 schools might fall into this category

Quote(s) of the week

- “She’s got a few more strokes than me” – Geoff Boycott returns a compliment to Theresa May, a long-term admirer of the Yorkshire man’s dogged tenacity
- “We need to help FE position itself as a centre of excellence” – the Education Secretary professes a new enthusiasm for FE and technical learning
- “I’m busier now than when I was a Minister” – Lord Baker continues to promote the cause of technical education for young people
- “Winter is coming” – the (perhaps) apt title of the Institute of Fiscal Studies’ latest assessment of UK public finances ahead of the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement
- “An uncertain outlook” – HEFCE’s assessment of the financial health of the HE sector
- “Personality, commitment, empathy, enthusiasm, experience and compassion” – just some of the qualities required by staff who work with post – 16 Entry/Level 1 students according to recent research
- “The Holy Grail” – the Schools Minister’s description of a test at age 11 that wouldn’t load the dice in favour of more advantaged children
- “The Dept must do more to demonstrate its commitment to accountability of around £18bn of public money” – the Chair of the Education Committee remains concerned about the DfE’s management of academy school finances

- “Broadly fit for purpose” – the verdict on the Standards and Testing Agency following a detailed review
- “Offloaded” – what Sir Michael Wilshaw believes happens to too many students with behavioural problems

Number(s) of the week

- £25bn. The annual increase in public borrowing by 2019/20 according to the latest report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 0.5%. The fall in industrial production over the last quarter according to the latest ONS data
- £4.8bn. How much the HE sector is hoping to raise in fee income from international students by 2018/19 (up from £3.6bn currently) but now felt to be optimistic in the light of Brexit
- 27,000+. The number of higher and degree apprenticeships that have started over the last year according to latest government figures
- 3%. The number of late entries for GCSE according to latest figures from Ofqual
- 4%. The increase in the number of requests for special consideration in this year’s GCSE and A’ level exams according to latest figures from Ofqual
- 804. The number of schools likely to be identified as coasting (including 479 at KS2 and 327 at KS4) when the results data for 2016 is formally confirmed, according to the latest figures from the DfE
- 76. The number of leading civic figures who signed a letter to The Times calling on the government to keep the 50% cap that prevents faith schools from selecting more students on religious grounds
- 64. The number of secondary head teachers in Surrey who signed a letter to the government opposing any more selective schools in their patch
- 1000+. The number of secondary schools in England and Wales using Classroom Management Software to help monitor student classroom online activity according to a report by Big Brother Watch
- 88%. The number of children who said their maths improved when their parents became more involved in their learning according to a new study of schools in London by National Numeracy
- £1.1bn. And in other news, how much shoppers spent online on Black Friday last year

What to look out for next week

- Second Reading of the Technical and Further Education Bill (Monday)
- Baroness Woolf Lecture at the Education Policy Institute (Monday)
- Association of Colleges Annual Conference (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday)
- Skills Show (Thursday, Friday, Saturday)