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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 4 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

No obvious lead this week but a number of familiar themes.

In no particular order, they include primary practice and Key Stage testing, school system reform, careers guidance, and apprenticeships. Each has grabbed headlines in a week which has even seen parents in one part of Europe come out in protest against the excessive incursions of homework. Tom Bennett's piece in the Guardian about some of the more dafter pieces of homework he has known ('colour in the Great Fire of London, write a letter from Jesus about what it was like to be on the cross') is worth the entrance money alone and can be found [here](#).

But back to those four core themes, starting with primary practice and Key Stage testing. There are two messages here. First what makes for effective primary practice, which to be fair has been consistently praised by Ofsted and this year, despite the introduction of a tougher national curriculum, saw 53% of pupils meet required standards in reading, writing and maths? The answer according to a report this week listed below is not rocket science but basic strong leadership, clear strategy and support for teaching and learning. Second, and more contentious, is there too much testing and does it help or hinder? The latest guidance on moderating teacher assessment has been welcomed but the arguments about the burden of testing continue and as indicated below a new campaign group, 'More than a Score,' has joined the fray.

Second, school system reform, raised once again in a wide-ranging valedictory speech by Sir Michael Wilshaw this week ('selection at the age of 11 is simply not the answer') and tackled in a new report by the think tank ResPublica where selection in disadvantaged areas at least, in this case Knowsley, was put forward as part of the answer. The issue of selection continues to divide and in fairness to both Sir Michael and ResPublica, it wasn't the only issue they raised. Sir Michael continues to bang the drum for strong leaders, 'battlers and bruisers' in his words while ResPublica valued team spirit, 'a Team GB' approach. For anyone interested in what happens to academies now that the pressure to join up is off, the blog listed below by Robert Hill, a former government adviser and long-standing observer of MATs, is worth a read.

Third careers guidance, still a cause of concern and where the two Education Committee Chairs put the government on notice this week that it is still waiting for the careers strategy, promised earlier this year. One of the more positives for schools when it comes to careers guidance is the gradual adoption of the 'Holman' benchmarks, eight criteria for good practice in career guidance, and now available on an app.

Finally, apprenticeships, where recent announcements were followed up this week with a backbench debate in Parliament and a Ministerial appearance in front of the Committee. We didn't perhaps learn much that was new but there was a good airing of views. It's been that kind of week.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Primary assessment: heads welcome new DfE guidance placing more trust in teachers.' ([Monday](#))
- 'School-leavers lack essential workplace skills.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Wilshaw: England's schools system is like its football team – not top notch.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'More than 6,000 primaries appeal against SATs reading scores.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Dyson invents his own college.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Unaccompanied refugee children](#). The government issued a written statement promising to review its guidance in this area and to produce an updated strategy by next May
- [Cyber security](#). The Chancellor announced a new five-year national cyber security strategy built around 3 Ds: Defend; Deter; Develop, all supported by new cyber innovation centres and global partnerships
- [Innovation audits](#). The Business Secretary, Greg Clark, announced publication of the first five Science and Innovation Audits around the country which bring together leading players such as local business, LEPs and universities to help develop opportunities for growth and innovation
- [Our friends in the North](#). The House of Commons Library produced a useful briefing Paper on the concept of the Northern Powerhouse and factors associated with it
- [Are children happier than they used to be?](#) Two experts looked at how policies intended to support and protect children have developed 30 years on from the launch of ChildLine concluding that increasing pressures mean children are no happier

HE

- [TEF 2](#). HEFCE published further guidance and details for institutions wishing to apply for Year 2 of the Teaching Excellence Framework
- [Learning Gain](#). HEFCE announced that ten higher education institutions will take part in its latest project intended to help develop features that could be used to measure how much students' knowledge and skills have developed over the course of their studies
- [Mutual benefits](#). Leaders from the Russell Group of UK universities met up with leaders from the top research universities in China, the so-called C9 Group, to discuss collaborative ventures in research, innovation and science

FE/Skills

- [Apprenticeship funding](#). The House of Commons Library published a helpful background pack for MPs who took part in a backbench debate on apprenticeship funding on Tuesday morning where strong views about the proposed funding bands were expressed



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- **'Pretty sure.'** Rob Halfon, the Skills Minister, said in answer to questions from the Education sub-committee, that he was 'pretty sure' by the time apprentices reached the end of their courses, there would be no shortage of end point assessment
- **Settling for the best.** The AoC claimed a peaceful settlement as the Trust proposing to set up a school sixth form in an area where there already was an established FE and Sixth Form College withdrew its application before the issue went to judicial review
- **Vince and the NUS.** The NUS announced that it would work with Sir Vince Cable on a new research project entitled 'Students Shaping FE,' designed to ensure greater student engagement in policy developments in FE, with a report due back next autumn
- **Hoovering up.** Sir James Dyson confirmed that he is to open a new Institute of Technology next year with courses linked to University of Warwick degrees, to help meet the demand for skilled engineers
- **Are UTCs the answer?** The data analysts School Dash trawled through subjects offered and performance achieved by current UTCs and concluded that when it comes to answering the question, the jury's still out

Schools

- **Still waiting.** The Chairs of the Education and Skills Committee issued a statement criticizing the government for failing to tackle many of the issues highlighted in their earlier report on careers guidance and for the delay in publishing a national careers strategy
- **Setting the Compass.** The Careers and Enterprise Company with the support of the Gatsby Foundation and other organisations, launched a new free online tool of identified metrics known as Compass, to help secondary schools measure the effectiveness of their careers guidance
- **Wilshaw's verdict.** Sir Michael cast his verdict on the performance of the English education system ('bit like the England football team, relying on past glories') in a wide-ranging speech to the FASNA Annual Conference in which he once again criticized the current enthusiasm for selective education and called instead for a stronger comprehensive system
- **School Funding.** The Schools Minister Nick Gibb confirmed in a speech at the FASNA Conference that the government will publish its response to the first stage of the funding consultation and launch the second stage of the consultation both before the end of the year
- **The Knowsley Way.** The think tank ResPublica published its commissioned report into education in Knowsley, one of the most deprived and lowest performing Boroughs, calling among other things for an Improvement Board, a Teaching Premium and for selective schools targeted at the most disadvantaged
- **Schools and social cohesion.** LKMCo, the education and youth action tank, published a new report calling for schools to take a lead role in social cohesion by involving students in decision making where possible and creating safe spaces for discussion as Brexit heats up
- **9 till 1.** Ofqual wrote to schools asking them to help spread the word about the changes to GCSE grading which start to come in from next year and inviting them to sign up to their '9 to 1 news' bulletin which will keep them informed of all the details
- **Welcome MAT.** Former government education adviser Robert Hill listed a number of possible options for multi-academy trusts (MATs) now that the government had dropped its plans for all schools to become academies



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- **Positive moderation.** The Standards and Testing Agency issued revised, and for many teachers more welcome, guidance on the moderation requirements for next year's KS2 writing tasks, allowing schools and teachers greater say on what's needed
- **Primary practice.** The Teaching Schools Council called for a fundamental review of the reception year as it set out four common principles (strong leadership, teacher CPD, resource allocation, strategic planning) for effective primary practice
- **Drop me a line.** The National Literacy Trust published its latest report on children and young people's writing showing that while attitudes hadn't changed drastically, fewer and fewer children (20.7% down from 27.2% the year before) actually wrote anything outside class as opposed to 68.6% who sent text messages
- **The dog didn't eat my homework.** The Guardian reported that parents in Spain where children face what is felt to be excessive amounts of homework (6.5 hours a week for 15 yr olds) are threatening to encourage their children to down books and refuse to do it as a mark of protest

Tweet(s) of the week

- "With the current recruitment crisis we should be worried teaching is becoming a young person's game" - @tes
- "We're not exactly dancing down the line with the latest apprenticeship announcements – Martin Dunford" - @AELPUK
- "15 lines of learning isn't going to cut it – the average millennial will have 10 - 14 careers in a lifetime" - @skillsforgrowth
- "We're not going to delay the apprenticeship levy. It would create a huge amount of insecurity - @halfon4harlowMP" - @tesfeneews

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- **Stress at work.** This week saw National Stress Awareness Day which among other things was marked by a new report by CIPD and Simplyhealth on absences at work through stress. According to the report, organisations are reporting a big increase in this area where the three most commonly cited factors appear to be, in order: workload; non-work factors, such as family and personal pressures; and management style. A link to the report is [here](#)
- **More than a score.** This is the name of a group of parents, teachers, psychotherapists and union officials who have joined together to campaign against the government's testing regime of primary children. As its title suggests, it believes children in England are over-tested and worth 'more than a score' and it is calling on the government to abandon next year's tests and conduct an independent review of the whole thing...a review the government is likely to claim it has already promised. A link to their website is [here](#).

Quote(s) of the week

- "The government expects to publish a consultation on non-EU work and study migration routes shortly" – the Home Secretary responds to a question in Parliament about student visas



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- “Six and a half out of ten” – Sir Michael Wilshaw grades the current performance of the English education system
- “A university in a 21st century British city plays a similar role to a cathedral in a medieval city...as a magnet of economic and cultural activity”- Will Hutton emphasizes the key role UK universities play in economic and cultural life as the Brexit challenge looms
- “The world is changing. It is now apples with pears” – the Skills Minister defends the new apprenticeship frameworks and standards in a debate in Parliament
- “What is vital is that people understand the system and how it works at different levels” – interim Apprenticeship Institute boss Peter Lauener on the new apprenticeship standards
- “I believe I have shown that I have walked the walk” – Toby Young, who will take over as director of the New Schools Network in January, outlines his credentials for the role
- “LAs must not dictate what schools’ evidence should look like or how it is presented for an external moderation visit” – the latest guidance on KS2 writing tasks is welcomed by teachers for its more common-sense approach
- “Setting homework is an act of faith about what will return; a boomerang thrown into the darkness” – Tom Bennett on the trials and travails of homework

Number(s) of the week

- £1.9bn. How much money the government is prepared to spend over the next five years on cyber security
- £700,000. The amount of money ‘lost’ last year on new Free Schools that received government support but failed to open according to official figures from the DfE
- £25,000. How much money the UK Games Fund is making available to help develop the UK’s next big video game according to the Dept of Culture, Media and Sport
- 3. The number of people now arrested in New Zealand for non-repayment of student loans where apparently over £ ½ m has been borrowed by people living overseas and who the government are keen to trace
- 40 or fewer. The number of colleges in poor financial health according to the FE commissioner, down from 76 the previous year
- 72%. The percentage of the population against religious selection in schools according to a survey by the British Humanist association
- 48. The current number of open UTCs with 7 more in the pipeline for 2017 and 3 having closed, as revealed in a Parliamentary answer this week
- 11. How many more times the price of an average property in London is now compared to the average salary of a local teacher according to recent figures from the Halifax
- 8. The number of nationally recognized benchmarks of ‘good’ careers guidance developed by Sir John Holman for the Gatsby Foundation a number of years ago and now adopted as part of a new online tool for secondary schools
- 1.9%. The number of applications made for a ‘review of marks’ in this year’s KS2 tests



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- 53. And in other news... 53 is the age at which people should stop wearing jeans according to research from a retail company

What to look out for next week

- US Presidential election (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on selective education (Tuesday)
- Access and HE Student Success Summit (Wednesday)