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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 21 October 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 important developments this week.

Top of the list, not least because it included the phrase; ‘the timeline from this point will bring greater stability,’ was the announcement by the Education Secretary late on Wednesday afternoon of some changes to primary assessment. It’s been a tense year for primary assessment, starting with the then Education Secretary’s proposal for Key Stage 2 resits, running through a difficult summer of a leaked paper and a reading test that brought tears to some children, to what is now a sensible pause to sort things out.

The Education Secretary’s statement, which has been broadly welcomed across the profession, included five main points: no new tests or assessments before 2018/19; no KS2 resits; no school ‘performance’ interventions solely on the basis of the 2016 test data; improved support generally; and a consultative review on the whole thing early next year particularly on how it aligns with accountability. The NAHT will also be publishing the results from their independent review of assessment at about the same time making 2017 already, the year of assessment – and that’s before we even mention EPAs (end point assessments for apprenticeships) which were raised as a concern in Committee this week.

The second important development this week has been the release at last (it was due in the summer) of the latest batch of information on the area review process currently consuming much of the FE sector. We’re now in wave 4 of a process which started over a year ago and is due to complete next spring. According to an accompanying letter from the outgoing FE Commissioner, it’s likely to see the status of some 50 or more colleges change through merger, a significant number of sixth form colleges become academies and ‘an annual reduction in sector running costs of between £250m - £500m.’

Quite what impact this will all have on the FE sector remains to be seen. The government’s aim was for a leaner, meaner sector, fewer but larger and more specialised institutions, better able to respond to skill needs and changing labour market models. The view that Brexit will make the demand for skills training even more urgent was reinforced this week with the release of two reports, one from the engineering professions and one from construction, both key industrial sectors and both raising concerns about future training. Brexit, it seems, is now prefacing most concerns about the future one way or another.

One final development to note this week was the latest listing of Cabinet Committees and Taskforces. There are 21 and Theresa May has made the brave decision to chair ten of them. But what makes them particularly interesting is that they offer a good indication of where government priorities lie. Five are on national security and four on industry and the economy but at least six cover current education issues: child care; youth employment; digital inclusion; visas; industrial strategy; and social reform.

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## Top headlines this week

- ‘Wilshaw: forget grammar schools and focus on vocational education.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Most grammar schools not prioritizing poor pupils.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Plans to make pupils resit SATs axed.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Progress 8: nearly 400 secondaries expected to be defined as coasting under new measure.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Foreign students not exempted from migration figures.’ ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [In Committee](#). The government published its latest listing of Cabinet Committees and Taskforces, 21 in all with a number covering education matters
- [Primary Assessment](#). The Education Secretary, Justine Greening, issued an important update on primary school assessment which included scrapping the proposed YR 7 resit tests and announcing a wider review of primary assessment to start early next year
- [Dear Chancellor](#). The British Chambers of Commerce published its submission to the Chancellor ahead of his Autumn Statement, calling for additional funding for infrastructure programmes and for the apprenticeship levy to be available for other forms of training
- [Brainstorming](#). The FT launched its own Great Debate on Brexit under the title of ‘the Future of Britain Project,’ inviting readers to offer their thoughts on 4 fundamental questions including what to do about the economy and immigration, culminating in a panel event early next year
- [Modernise or Die](#). The government’s commissioned report on the UK Construction Labour Model, led by Mark Farmer, listed ten recommendations including a reformed CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) in, as the title implies, a fairly direct report
- [Engineering a future outside the EU](#). The UK’s 38 engineering professions came together to offer their thoughts on what Brexit might mean in a new report compiled by the Royal Academy of Engineering with a big shout on maintaining strong links with Europe whatever happens
- [Nursery concerns](#). The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) published the results of its latest workforce survey showing that the requirement for staff to hold C or above grades in English and maths is having a detrimental effect on recruitment and capabilities
- [Inclusive workplaces](#). The CBI issued a report highlighting the business case for more inclusive workplaces calling for more flexible working, anonymized application forms and more constructive appraisal systems

## HE

- [Measuring graduate outcomes](#). The HE Statistics Agency (HESA) reported on the results of its recent consultation on how best to measure graduate outcomes and destinations where there was some support for trying to capture other data such as skills and for moving the survey point on to 12 months and potentially 18 months as well



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- [Campus Culture](#). The Universities UK Taskforce published its report calling for stronger institution-wide procedures to help deal with issues of violence against women, hate crime and harassment
- [Hopping on and off the HE bus](#). University Alliance blogged about more flexible forms of HE provision as one of a number of measures that might help improve social mobility
- [Customer satisfaction](#). HEFCE reported on its latest survey of how satisfied or not graduates were with their choice of university finding most were, although different ethnic groups were less so and 1/3 overall would consider choosing a different subject
- [Excellence in Imperial measures](#). Imperial College announced further details of its new Excellence Fund which will see £1m a year distributed to support innovative ideas in research and teaching

## FE/Skills

- [Guidance at last](#). The DfE finally issued its latest batch of guidance documents on area reviews broadly building on what had been published earlier in the year, with further guidance on applying for restructuring funds, the latest update on area review scheduling and procedures for Sixth Form Colleges applying for Academy status
- [Restructuring funds](#). The DfE updated its guidance for FE and Sixth Form Colleges seeking transitional funds to help with re-structuring following area reviews
- [Premium rates](#). The Learning and Work Institute published a further report on apprenticeships with the introduction of an apprenticeship premium for 16-18 year olds and a fixed price rate for each standard among its five headline recommendations
- [Collab is here](#). The new College grouping, formed out of the 'old' 157 Group, made its entrance with a launch and new website and a new range of activity to follow
- [The Commissioner Team](#). The government formally announced the changes to the FE Commissioner team
- [Apprenticeships inquiry](#). Mark Dawe, chief executive of the learning providers' association, wrote up a summary of last week's Public Accounts Committee witness session on apprenticeships highlighting two issues that were raised, covering small employers and core sectors

## Schools

- [So far, so good](#). The NAHT published a chart showing where progress over primary assessment reform had been made and where concerns still remained following the latest government concessions
- [The Rochford Review](#). The final report from the group which has been looking at assessment principles for pupils below the standard of national curriculum tests was published, recommending among its 10 proposals the removal of the statutory requirement to use the P scales and the adoption of the earlier designated pre-key stage standards where appropriate
- [Challenging times](#). The Local Government Association (LGA) challenged government plans to give RSCs responsibility for overseeing school standards from next year arguing that local authorities had greater capacity and schools tended to perform better under their auspices
- [The importance of choice](#). The Centre for the Study of Market Reform of Education (CMRE) formally launched a new publication on choice and competition in the qualification and assessment market



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arguing that the prescriptive nature of the qualification framework rather than multiple exam boards encouraged a lack of innovation and incentive to provide different and more challenging qualifications

- [Sampling teacher shortage](#). The Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, confirmed in evidence to the Education Committee that the government was looking at new ways of identifying teacher shortages including the use of monitoring at a selected sample of schools
- [Selection abroad](#). The Reform think tank published a useful blog looking at how far selection practices were used abroad, comparing their use in three other countries: Sweden, Germany and the USA
- [Maths by stealth](#). National Numeracy, the charity dedicated to promoting maths for all, released a new free mobile app – Star Dash Studios – based on the charity’s Essentials of Numeracy model and intended to help promote functional maths among young people
- [Ne nous oubliez pas](#). Parliament’s All Party Parliamentary Group on Modern languages listed four key principles including residency status for current EU nationals and a post Brexit education plan in a new [briefing](#) document designed to protect languages under Brexit negotiations
- [Nobody suggested banning pens](#). Former Schools Minister Jim Knight argued in a comment piece in the TES that simply banning technology in schools wouldn’t make abusive behaviour disappear

## Tweet(s) of the week

- “Nottingham schools cap teacher workload at 2 hours per night” [@SchoolsWeek](#)
- “The Skills Minister again saying he wants to ban the word vocational. Says too much like vocation” - [@FEWeek](#)
- “The last 5/6 years of education reform is now reaching its peak says [@NickGibbMP](#). 2016 was always going to be challenging and so it’s proved” - [@tes](#)
- “Today is the day! Goodbye 157 Group, hello partnerships, hello synergy, hello cooperation, hello Collab” - [@157Group](#)

## Word or phrase(s) of the week

- More’s Law and Neilson’s Law. Both were cited in a speech this week to the Broadband World Forum by Matt Hancock, the Minister for Digital and Culture. Apparently More’s Law, now over 50 years old, states that the complexity of computer chips ought to double roughly every two years while the more recent Neilson’s Law states that network connection speeds for top-end broadband use would double every two years. Experts claim that the latter law has now superseded the former, though neither seems to apply to London’s Central Line

## Quote(s) of the week

- “If you said to somebody that there was legislation in the UK that stopped good schools from opening or expanding they would say: ‘what on earth are you doing’” – Theresa May defends grammar schools
- “No new national tests or assessments introduced before the 2018/19 academic year” – the Education secretary says the words many teachers want to hear



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- “Once we have a final figure for what our overall financial envelope is, then we’ll be able to finalise our workforce planning including how we are represented in the UK” – the Permanent Secretary at the BEIS Dept tells the Committee they’re still working out the budget
- “Raising engagement isn’t about slapping another zero on the budget for the staff Christmas party. It’s a complex process which takes time and hard work” – CBI President Paul Drechsler on how to improve engagement and productivity in the workplace
- “Inexorable decline” – What the UK construction industry faces unless drastic action is taken according to a recent report
- “Early myths have been dispelled” – the FE Commissioner reports some fog lifting from the area review process
- “If you’re going to make a success of Brexit, this should be the number one priority of government. Not grammar schools” – Sir Michael Wilshaw calls on the government to prioritize technical education rather than grammar schools
- “I believe that the wise parent does not want their child wrapped in cotton wool but does want them to be supported” – the head teacher at Wellington school reflects on what parents of today want
- “When workload is the lash, the goad and rack of possibility, spending each second wisely is no longer a luxury” – a stirring blog by Tom Bennett on the perils of double or even triple marking

## Number(s) of the week

- 3. By how many points the Conservatives lead Labour on education policy, 28% to 25%, according to a recent YouGov poll
- 0.8%. The latest prediction for UK GDP growth next year, this time from the Ernst Young Item Club, and showing a drop from 1.9% this year, though a projected increase to 1.4% for 2018
- 1.66m. The latest (June – August) unemployment figure, up slightly on the previous quarter but down on the figure at the same point last year
- 21%. How many employees, according to the Resolution Foundation, were on low pay in 2015, the last year for which full data is available
- £100m. How much additional funding the Welsh government is putting into education and skills over the next 4 years under its latest Budget plans
- 10.3%. The number of persistent absentees (pupils not teachers) in state primary and secondary schools in the autumn 2015 and spring 2016 terms according to latest data

## What to look out for next week

- Pearson Teaching Awards ceremony (Sunday)
- Education Committee witness session on financial management at the DfE (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on post-16 area reviews (Wednesday)
- Education Policy Institute/Pearson conference on employability (Wednesday)
- Apprenticeships4England ‘Levy’ Conference (Thursday)