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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 7 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

The last of the annual Political Party get-togethers drew to a close this week, south of the border at least, with the Conservatives wrapping up the Conference season with four days of discussion in Birmingham.

The key figure has been the 'new' Prime Minister who has set a new agenda, with her opening speech at the start of the Conference announcing the launch date for the Brexit process to begin and for her final speech at the end of the Conference, heralded by the Rolling Stones track 'Start me up,' announcing 'a quiet revolution.' These two 'big boys' – Brexit and a quiet revolution – provide the stanchions of government policy while 'working for everyone' especially the 'just managing' provides the moral purpose.

Most of the week was given over to comments and announcements around these two issues with for education followers at least, these ten pointers standing out. In order of announcement...

1. The Brexit process to start next year, no later than March 2017 with a Repeal Bill ending our formal ties with the EU and handing sovereign power back being included in the Queen's Speech a month or so later. Existing workers' legal rights will remain but the status of EU nationals remains contentious. The EU's chief negotiator has confirmed there'll be no pre talk talks so the blank sheet looks a bit blanker
2. In an interesting move, the government announced an independent review into 'modern employment.' To be chaired by former No 10 adviser, Matthew Taylor, this will start to address some of the issues of the modern gig economy, workers' rights, flexible working practices and so on
3. The Chancellor announced he was scrapping the Osborne target of a surplus by 2020, confirmed continuing commitment to the National Infrastructure Commission and Northern Powerhouse and announced extra funding for some high-tech projects. All eyes are now on the Autumn statement
4. Free training in basic digital skills for adults that need it. This will be added to the current Digital Economy Bill, put digital skills on a par with basic literacy and numeracy and please some training institutions
5. In perhaps the most contentious speech, the Home Secretary took immigration restrictions seriously announcing clamp downs on overseas workers and students. Consultation to follow but the intent to link international student recruitment to 'quality' courses and providers has provoked great alarm
6. The Education Secretary announced the creation of new Opportunity Areas (see below for details)
7. The Education Secretary also committed to prioritising the Skills Plan
8. The Defence Secretary announced the creation of more cadet units in state schools
9. The DWP Secretary announced a new champion for older workers
10. The PM in her closing speech signalled a key role for education in her social mobility agenda including, where certain caveats are met, the lifting of the ban on establishing new grammar schools



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## Top headlines this week

- 'Grammar schools will not be in every town, says Theresa May.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Greening launches opportunity areas.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Only 2% of young people in UK take apprenticeships, says OECD.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Teenagers checking mobile phones in night.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Building new schools must be top priority for government.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [A quiet revolution](#). Theresa May promised a quiet revolution but plenty of change in her Leader's speech at her Party's Conference which saw a commitment to use the powers of the state including the creation of grammar and faith schools to help provide access and opportunity to help the 'just managing'
- [Brexit means?](#) Theresa May set out her initial thoughts on timing, process and vision for Brexit in her opening speech to her Party's Annual Conference
- [Trying to set the pulses racing](#). The Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond admitted it was hard to get the pulses racing on economic policy in his Conference speech but did start the process of resetting the Osborne agenda by scrapping the 2020 surplus target, investing to support productivity and infrastructure, and backing growth plans in other regions
- [Education at the heart of a meritocratic society](#). The Education Secretary Justine Greening supported opening out the school system and strengthening skills provision but lined up the creation of new Opportunity Areas as her main announcement in her Conference speech
- [Touching some raw nerves](#). Home Secretary Amber Rudd touched some raw nerves in her Conference speech with her announcements of tighter controls on foreign workers and overseas students with consultation promised on the aligning visas to course and institutional quality
- [2Rs and a D](#). The government confirmed free basic digital skills training would be offered to adults that needed it under changes being made to the Digital Economy Bill (for a brief view on digital developments from Matt Hancock, the Minister shepherding the Bill, see his [blog](#) on the Reform website)
- [Gig jobs](#). The government announced a new, independent commission under former No 10 adviser and current Chief Exec of the RSA, Matthew Taylor, to look into how changing work practices, job opportunities and employment protections are likely to affect people now and in the future
- [Championing older workers](#). The government announced the appointment of the boss of Aviva UK, Andy Briggs, as the new 'champion' for older workers
- [Society at a Glance](#). The OECD followed up its hefty Education at a Glance with a report on social wellbeing and trends highlighting in particular the problems faced by young people with low level literacy and numeracy skills and the low (2%) rate of apprenticeship participation in the UK
- [The top 100 on the right](#). Publisher and broadcaster Iain Dale published his latest annual list of the top 100 movers and shakers on the right of the political spectrum showing the Cameroons down and the Mayites up



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- [Girls' Attitudes Survey](#). Girlguiding published its latest annual survey on issues concerning young females aged 7-21, highlighting social media, body image, well-being and education as prime concerns

## HE

- [Ready, get set](#). HMC and the GSA (independent boys' and girls' schools) published the results of a survey of sixth formers preparing to go to uni this autumn showing that most were looking forward to getting stuck into their courses, had mixed views about freshers' week, were not over concerned about how posh the facilities were and listed money and workloads as their two top worries
- [Walk, chalk and talk](#). A Cambridge University lecturer outlined her recipe for giving successful lectures

## FE/Skills

- [The view from here](#). The Association of Colleges (AoC) responded to the Home Secretary's announcement on tightening immigration rules by noting that 160 colleges which currently have 'highly trusted' status permitting them to recruit overseas students, could be affected
- [Rabbiting on about apprenticeships](#). AELP Chief exec Mark Dawe provide a helpful summary of the Skills Minister's latest thoughts on apprenticeships expressed during his various presentations at this year's Conservative Party Conference events
- [Latest stats](#). The DFE and Skills Funding Agency published the latest set of provisional stats on learner participation and outcomes for 2015/16 showing apprenticeship starts up slightly on the previous year
- [How are we doing?](#) The Education and Training Foundation launched its annual 'how are we doing?' survey which runs until 26 October

## Schools

- [No shotgun weddings](#). The new chair of the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference (HMC) which represents over 280 of the country's leading independent schools, called on the government not to force independent and state schools to work together but to allow current partnerships to flourish, in an opening address speech to the HMC
- [Selective choices](#). The DfE published a propitious analysis of the types of secondary schools chosen by parents for their children this year arguing that more had chosen state-funded selective schools than places available
- [Funding primer](#). Jonathan Simons of Policy Exchange offered a brief primer on school funding and the issues involved as we await the government's response to its initial consultation on the matter
- [Parents' Panel](#). Ofsted reported on the workings of its Parents' Panel where parents have commented on anything from A apprenticeships ('don't know enough about them') to S study programmes (again parents saying they don't have enough info on them)
- [Research Schools](#). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Institute for Effective Education (IEF) announced the first five schools to be funded as research centres and work with up to 1,000 other schools to develop evidence-based research to support teaching and learning



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- **Bienvenue, Welkom.** Leading private schools announced that they will work with the government to create a new national teacher-training centre for language teachers to help boost language teaching in schools
- **Tools for wellbeing.** The National Children's Bureau and Partnership for Wellbeing and Mental Health in schools launched a new self-assessment and resource pack for schools
- **Early years.** Professor John Howson, education commentator and leading expert on teacher recruitment, blogged about how to raise school performance and argued that the early years rather than selection at age 11 was more important
- **Hello Mr Chips.** Professor Dumbledore topped the list of the most popular teachers in fiction from a survey published by the British Council to mark World Teachers' Day; Mr Chips came 2<sup>nd</sup> and another Harry Potter character, Severus Snape, came 3<sup>rd</sup>

## Tweet(s) of the week

- "Halfon doesn't like word 'vocational,' has told his dept not to use it. Says apprenticeships are a professional technical education" - @FEWeek
- "ONS figures show 29% of graduates earn less per hour than average non-graduate who has completed an apprenticeship" - @pwatsonmontrose
- "A strong school will have 10 football teams and 6 plays a year. Gosh poor old rugby and music eh?" - @stephenhepell
- "Coe at #HMCCConf16 – strong argument advanced for adaptive tests instead of conventional exams, using modern tech not paper/pencil" - @RPBackhouse
- "Delighted for @edballs – a Labour victory we can all celebrate" @MichaelGove

## Word or phrase(s) of the week

- **Opportunity Area.** Announced by the Education Secretary in her Conference speech this week, Opportunity Areas are the latest attempt to coral activity and resources and target them on a particular part of the country suffering from social and educational problems. Previous incarnations have ranged from Education Action Zones nearly 14 years ago to Achieving Excellence Areas in this year's White Paper. Six Areas have been listed so far and more will follow. Each is intended to benefit from what the Education Secretary called "an extra push" where a range of partners including colleges, universities, businesses and other schools and Authorities, supported by additional funding, will work together to try and turn things round
- "The weight of the world is love/ Under the burden of solitude/ under the burden of dissatisfaction." The opening lines of 'Song' by Allen Ginsberg, one of the poems chosen to be read on World Poetry Day this week

## Quote(s) of the week

- "Way back when I was chairing an Education Committee more than a quarter of a century ago, we were talking about other measures (apart from free school meals) to identify those people who are struggling"



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- Theresa May confirms the government is looking at other ways of identifying the just managing families whose children might benefit from grammar schools
- “I want to see businesses spotting and polishing up the talent of a new generation...the rough diamonds” – the Education Secretary encourages business to go mining for talent
- “Every day I go into an office so vast you could comfortably fit two squash courts and so dripping with gilt bling that it looks like something from the Kardashians” – Boris Johnson shows us through the keyhole of the Foreign Secretary’s office
- “Can you see yourself walking up and down the corridors and making friends there?” the Daily Telegraph’s Online Education Editor offers advice on what prospective uni students should look out for as the latest season of university open days get under way
- “It had got out of control 10 years ago but was being reined back in” – the Gen-Sec of the HMC offers a perspective on freshers’ weeks taking place up and down the country this week
- “I’m not going to lie to you, inevitably there may be some gaming of the system but I don’t actually believe it will be widespread” – the Skills Minister re-assures doubters about the apprenticeship levy
- “Don’t sit down and say nothing, expecting the teacher to take the lead. It feels like a visit from the Krays” – education ‘expert’ Tom Bennett provides some tips for parents about Parents’ Evenings
- “We believe that a bold agenda for improving social mobility without creating more grammar schools can help transform millions of lives” – 57 leading commentators sign a letter to The Times criticizing government plans to allow more grammar schools

## Number(s) of the week

- £16,000 - £21,000. How much the ‘just managing’ group, the core target group of current government policy, are said to earn
- 5.3m. How many people in the UK have never used the Internet according to a recent ONS survey
- £0.25. The increase in the hourly national minimum wage for 21 – 24 yr olds from the start of this month, up from £6.70 to £6.95. For 18 – 2 yr olds it’s risen from £5.30 to £5.55 an hour (the National Living Wage which is worth £7.20 an hour is only available to those aged 25 and above)
- 51%. How many parents in a survey from the Prudential, disagreed that that graduates can climb the ladder faster than apprentices, although they did tend to agree apprentices get paid more poorly
- 25.4%. The number of young people (18-29) in the UK with low level numeracy skills, 10% above the OECD average in the latest report from the international organization
- 503,700. The number of apprenticeship starts this year, 2015/1, according to latest government figures
- 35,385. The demand for ‘state-funded’ selective secondary school places this year, outstripping supply by over 10,000 according to government figures
- £ ½ m. How much leading independent schools spend each day on means-tested bursaries for students according to figures given by HMC
- 5,800. How many pupils were permanently excluded in 2014/15, up considerably against previous numbers in the latest figures released



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## What to look out for next week

- Work experience week (all week)
- Education Questions in Parliament (Monday)
- Publication of Education Policy Institute report on teacher workload and professional development in English secondary schools (Monday)
- Universities UK Conference on the HE White Paper (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on multi-academy trusts (Wednesday)
- Public Accounts Committee witness session on value in apprenticeships (Wednesday)