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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 30 September 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

Something for nearly everyone this week with education policy featuring prominently at the Labour Party Conference, Lord Baker doing a Tomlinson on the 14-19 curriculum, the Association of Colleges (AoC) calling for a 'phased implementation' of the apprenticeship levy and, one month on from August's results day, UCAS publishing the latest figures on 2016 university entry.

Let's start with this week's annual gathering in Liverpool for the Labour Party Conference, "four days that shook the Wirral" as Wonkhe's Martin McQuillan put it.

The Conference has of course provided extensive media fodder but has revealed some Labour interest in education matters. Quite where the interest will end up remains to be seen but by way of headlines, it may be worth noting these six. First, employers being asked to dig deeper and help fund a National Education Service (see section below;); second, a new Childcare Taskforce being set up; third, opposing selection in education starting with a campaign to be launched this weekend; fourth, resurrecting Education Maintenance Allowances for FE and maintenance grants for HE along with the traditional call to end the snobbery over vocational education; fifth committing to a £250bn investment programme as part of a new industrial strategy; and sixth setting up an independent commission to investigate the future of work in a robotic age. Next week the Conservatives are in conference; wonder if grammar schools will get a mention.

Next Lord Baker who continues to fly the flag for a core curriculum for young people that better matches the needs of a fast-moving technological society. Will the EBacc do this? No, not in its current form at least, according to Lord Baker who in his latest report for the Edge Foundation argued for broadening the scope of the EBacc from age 16. For him it should include a technical award, young apprenticeships, more specialist providers and more opportunities for college courses and work experience, all recognised in a leaving diploma. All things to gladden the hearts of those still smarting from the dropping of the landmark Tomlinson report, 12 years ago, there's even a picture of the cover of that report for the misty-eyed.

Now apprenticeships, where the road to the introduction of the levy next year continues to prove rocky. This week brought news that the provider register had fallen foul of a few delays leaving the Association of Colleges (AoC) to add their support to some employer voices calling for a phased introduction.

Finally, HE where another busy week has seen UCAS publish its regular report on university admission numbers one month on from the summer results day and showing a slight (1%) in acceptances this year but a slight decrease in the numbers entering with higher BTEC and A' level grades following recent changes. Longer term, both the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Brexit are likely to prove game-changers and both have seen developments this week as the listings below show.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Brexit fears may see 15% of university staff leave, group warns.' (Monday)
- 'Labour will defeat grammars plans, pledges Rayner.' (Tuesday)
- 'Former Education Secretary Lord Baker attacks government EBacc target.' (Wednesday)
- 'SATs: Big fall in number of 7yr olds reaching expected standards under tougher testing regime.' (Thursday)
- 'Tuition fees heading over £9,500.' (Friday).

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **A strategy for all regions.** Greg Clark, the BEIS Secretary, spelt out in a speech to the Institute of Directors how the government was keen to ensure its new industrial strategy would ensure benefits were spread across the country rather than located in particular regions
- **A National Education Service.** Jeremy Corby made education reform a core part of his pitch in his Conference speech with a call for a comprehensive National Education Service, a primary arts premium, and maintenance allowances and grants for further and higher study
- **All you need is.** Shadow Chancellor invoked the spirit of John Lennon as he set out his economic plans to end tax avoidance, austerity and poor wages and invest instead in infrastructure, worker ownership and a 'real' living wage, in his set piece Conference speech
- **No to segregation.** Labour's Shadow Education Secretary Angel Rayner announced a new Childcare Taskforce, an end to segregation policies in schools and a bringing back of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in her set piece speech to the Labour Conference
- **Take to the streets.** Jeremy Corbyn called for a day of action this Saturday to help launch a campaign against the government's plans for selection in education
- **Facing up to Brexit.** The Institute for Government published a Briefing Paper on how the government was shaping up to deal with Brexit suggesting that it needs to be clearer in its strategy and will need an extra 500 staff costing up to £65m a year just to plan things
- **Would you Adam and Eve it?** A new report commissioned by HSBC on spoken English in the future, suggested that the Queen's English, regional accents and slang are all likely to disappear in the coming years as voice biometrics, American culture and changing communities chip away at standard English.

HE

- **Latest entry stats.** UCAS published its interim report on university entry numbers one month on from A' level results day showing a 1% increase in university acceptances overall as against Sept 2015 but a slight slowing of numbers entering with high BTEC and A' level grades
- **TEF stuff.** The DfE published a further set of Papers on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) covering its response to the technical consultation, a review of the data sources and arrangements for Year 2 of the Framework's application
- **The price of Diamond.** Professor Sir Ian Diamond published the conclusions of his 2+ - year review into HE funding and student finance arrangements in Wales recommending a 're-working of the



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student support package' with the introduction of a loan system for tuition fees but a supportive maintenance grant system for living costs and help for part-timers and postgrads

- **Upfront costs.** Money saving expert Martin Lewis wrote to the HE Minister calling on him to spell out more clearly how much parents are being expected to contribute to the costs of a university education
- **Reporting on outreach.** The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and the Sutton Trust announced a jointly funded project to investigate and report back on how universities and colleges evaluate outreach activities
- **Impact of Brexit.** The Education Committee launched an inquiry into the potential impact of Brexit on aspects of higher education.

FE/Skills

- **Wherever I lay my hat.** Peter Lauener was announced as the interim, part-time Chief Exec of the Institute for Apprenticeships, adding to his existing roles as Chief Exec of both the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency
- **Putting you on hold.** The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) announced its intention of putting the loans growth programme on hold while it made some adjustments to align with the Skills Plan proposals
- **College recruits.** The TES reported that the number of colleges taking on 14-16 yr olds had dropped for the first time since the scheme to take on young people started three years ago
- **A year of mental health.** The Association of Colleges' new President announced that he intended to use his ear in office to concentrate on helping to improve support for mental health in colleges
- **Brum's best.** Birmingham won the award of the most enterprising place in Britain in the 2016 Enterprising Britain Awards.

Schools

- **More test results.** The DfE published the results from this year's phonics and KS1 assessments showing an increase in the numbers reaching the phonics standard but a drop in the numbers reaching the more challenging reading, writing and maths assessment levels
- **The 14-19 conundrum.** Lord Baker returned to the issue of 14-19 education in a new publication for the Edge Foundation, calling for a broadening of the EBacc offer and increase in the number of technical college providers to enable young people to develop the skills and aptitudes needed for the 21st c
- **Is there anything left to say on grammar schools?** Nick Hillman, Director of the HE Policy Institute and former Ministerial adviser examined the tensions evident in the grammar school debate between the needs of individuals and the needs of society in an interesting blog
- **Checking the boxes.** The DfE gave schools and colleges a two week window to check data being used for this year's performance tables where initial results are due to be published next month and final publication is set for January 2017
- **Dissecting Progress 8.** Head 'guru' teacher, Tom Sherrington provided a fascinating analysis of the implications of Progress 8 for his school highlighting in particular the need to encourage the performance of 'outlier' students, those on the margins who often get left behind but whose performance now counts
- **Thumbs down.** The National Governors' Association found a growing number of school governors



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unhappy about teacher recruitment, funding and the general direction of government policy in its latest 'state of the nation' survey of governors and academy trustees

- **Could do better.** Capita SIMS published the results of its survey into the traditional school report used by primary schools and concluded that as a way of communicating to parents it had pretty much had its day and a more personalized system was needed.

Tweet(s) of the week

- "We have gone from Every Child Matters to actually Maybe Only a Few Really Matter" - [@tes](#)
- "School leavers graffiti town, prove education was wasted on them by spelling everything wrong" - [@Independent](#)
- "My poor knowledge of Greek mythology has always been my Achilles elbow" - [@JohnRentoul](#).

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- A National Education Service. Jeremy Corbyn made much of this in his Conference speech this week but what is it? It was an idea he put forward in his first leadership campaign last year, returning to it on occasions subsequently and making it a key feature of his Conference speech this week. Embodying the features of the NHS, 'cradle to grave' and 'accessible to all' and so on, recent speeches suggest it could include some or all of these features: more pre - school provision, class sizes under 30, the abolition of tuition fees, more college - employer partnerships and re - invigorated adult learning ... all paid for from clamping down on tax avoidance, raising corporation tax and not cutting general tax.

Quote(s) of the week

- "To help pay for a National Education Service, we will ask you to pay a little more in tax" – Jeremy Corbyn calls on employers to dig deeper in support of education
- "I might not have an academic degree but I've got a masters in real life" – Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner explains how she deals with snobbery about her 'ordinary' background
- "Good students are being love-bombed with offers as soon as they send in their applications" – UCAS Chief Exec suggests that HE applicants now hold the strings as universities look to fill up places
- "They will expect their bedroom to be exactly as they left it and your routines to be the same as ever" – tips for parents from the Complete University Guide about what to expect when their offspring return home from university for Christmas
- "There's very little left for him to run" – AELP Chief Exec Mark Dawe reacts to the news that Peter Lauener has taken on a third job as part-time Chief Exec of the Institute for Apprenticeships
- "Wishful thinking will not solve the problems of deprivation and nor will the EBacc in its current form" – Lord Baker tackles 14-19 learning in a new publication
- "There are not enough hours in the day for a teacher to teach, set homework, mark homework and plan their lessons" – the head teacher of the latest school to abandon homework
- "Low level disruptive behavior is misnamed – it is not low level – it is stealing other students' curriculum time and schools should not stand for it" – a head teacher and member of the new Parents and Teachers for Excellence Group blogs about the importance of structured conditions for learning.



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Number(s) of the week

- 522,000. How many students have been accepted to UK universities so far this year, up 1% on last year according to latest comparable figures from UCAS
- £1,000. How much Welsh domiciled undergrads are set to receive as an annual non-means tested maintenance grant under the latest proposals for funding Welsh HE
- £27,000. How much 30 yr olds typically have in terms of average net wealth (including savings, pension and housing,) nearly half what the generation before them had at the same stage according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 31. The number of apprentices starting at Ofsted this week
- 27.2%. The drop in the number of entries for Design and Technology subjects over the last 5 years since the EBacc was proposed, according to figures published by Lord Baker
- £160m. The value of Jeremy Corbyn's promised arts pupil premium for primary schools in England and Wales
- 65%, 73% and 74%. The number of pupils who reached expected standards in this year's tougher KS1 writing, maths and reading assessments as against 88%, 93% and 90% last year
- 53%. How many governors and trustees are unhappy with the general direction of government education policy according to the latest survey from the National Governors' Association.

What to look out for next week

- Conservative Party Conference (Sunday – Wednesday)
- Brexit theme at the Conservative Conference (Sunday)
- Chancellor's speech at the Conservative Conference (Monday)
- Education speech at the Conservative Conference (Tuesday)
- PM's speech at the Conservative Conference (Wednesday).