



Pearson

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 11 August 2017

(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 Policy Eye last week so two weeks' worth of news to catch up on this time round with a government announcement on data protection, an important report on the attainment gap in schools, some reflections on the concluding FE area review process and further noise around HE, all making the news.

Links to these and other stories below but here's some of the headline detail in each case.

The data protection announcement first, which came on the same day as the Children's Commissioner launched a new campaign to help parents encourage children to engage safely with social media. Data protection has become an increasingly important policy issue and a new Bill was proposed in the government's manifesto. The aim as the Minister explained this week is to upgrade the 1998 Act, import the latest EU standards and grant people greater control over their personal data. Getting social media platforms to remove personal data and images held before individuals were aged 18 is one example of this.

Next that report on the attainment gap, part of an important piece of work by the Education Policy Institute. It's an issue that troubles politicians, parents and professionals alike and this latest report doesn't make for very cheery reading with the suggestion that at the current rate of progress it could take 50 years to close the disadvantage gap at age 16. There're no easy answers. As another report out last week indicated, money isn't the only answer. The best hope seems to lie in a model like in the former London Challenge, essentially an intensive blend of local leadership, visionary thinking and investment plus targeted intervention, being partially replicated in the government's latest approach through Opportunity Areas.

Third, the FE sector area review process where the publication of the final set of area reports last week signalled the end of the latest cycle of sector reform. The aim had been to create a more resilient, financially viable and responsive provider system but was hampered from the start by not including all the players-school sixth forms for instance were notable by their absence. How different the sector will be when it all shakes down is hard to see at present, the emergence of Institutes of Technology in coming months may for instance have more long-term impact. FE Week and the AoC have both examined the entrails this week to see what lessons can be learned as the sector braces itself for the next phase of challenges.

Finally that noise around HE which this week centred on a Sunday newspaper article claiming that UK universities were overlooking British students in favour of more lucrative foreign students. The claim was roundly debunked by Universities UK, HEFCE, THES and Wonkhe among others. There've been three more stories this week, some with lurid headlines, and as John Gill of the Times Higher and David Morris of Wonkhe both highlighted, there's a danger of an anti-uni backlash growing. It'll be a shame if any of this feeds into A' level students who get their results next week.



Pearson

Top headlines this week

- 'Don't wrap pupils in cotton wool, Ofsted head tells schools.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Pass rates hold steady in Scottish exams.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Students satisfied with degree courses, poll suggests.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Area Reviews: Colleges receive £5.5m in transition grants.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Top universities scramble to fill places amid dip in student applications.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Data protection](#). The government announced it was planning to strengthen and update current measures through a new Data Protection Bill that would among other things repeal the 1998 Act, import the latest EU data protection standards and enable individuals to request personal data to be removed
- [5 A Day](#). The Children's Commissioner launched a new guide for parents, built around five basic rules (connect, be active, get creative, give to others, be mindful) intended to help children develop a more 'healthy' approach to social media use

HE

- [Yes to satisfaction](#). HEFCE published the results of its latest annual National Student Survey (NSS,) boycotted by some student groups in a protest against rising fees but with the majority of those responding indicating high levels of course satisfaction though with continuing concerns about issues like assessment and feedback
- [Checking the data](#). Wonkhe, like many HE commentators, highlighted inaccuracies in the way in which the Sunday Times had interpreted student admissions data to suggest in a leading article that UK universities were prioritizing more profitable international students at the expense of domestic ones
- [Fair access](#). Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access for HE, reported on some of the progress made on improving access to higher ed and outlined some of the issues that remain as widening access prepares to come under the new Office for Students from next year
- [10-point plan](#). The Russell Group of universities listed ten points where a bit more clarity is needed on the status of EU nationals and UK qualifications post-Brexit, including ensuring automatic transfer to settled status for those with permanent residence, establishing clear commitments for EU students starting this year and next and making sure study periods abroad don't affect status rights
- [Accelerated degrees](#). Former UCAS Chief Exec Mary Curnock Cook examined the issues around 2-year degrees in an article for the Daily Telegraph suggesting it was a model worth considering

FE/Skills

- [Area Reviews](#). David Hughes, Chief Exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC) listed five lessons to be taken forward particularly around future vision, strategy and funding, as the area review process for colleges drew to a close



Pearson

- **Transition grants.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published how much funding has been granted to individual providers to help manage changes under the area review process
- **Careering through FE.** The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) along with the Society for Education and Training (SET) published an earlier report into career progression in FE suggesting considerable enthusiasm but also hurdles in the form of workload and time available
- **NEET Up.** The Private Equity Foundation Impetus-PEF published its latest Youth Jobs Index, compiled using new tracking data by the Learning and Work Institute and showing that the number of young people who had been out of education, employment or training for over a year had increased substantially from the previous year and calling, as part of the solution, for GCSE resits to be more accessible
- **All joined-up.** Three college bodies, the Education and Training Foundation, Association of Colleges and University and College Union, agreed to join forces to create a single FE workforce database for the future

Schools

- **A challenging gap.** The Education Policy Institute published new research showing that only slow progress is being made in closing the attainment gap between different groups and regions and concluding that it would take 50 years before the disadvantage gap at GCSE was fully closed
- **Going to uni?** The Sutton Trust reported on its latest annual poll on the university hopes and fears of 11-16 year olds noting a further drop in the numbers saying they were keen with the costs of fees, loans and paybacks a particular concern
- **The same but different.** The three UK qualification regulators explained what the changes for this year's exams mean ahead of results day, pointing out the similarities and differences in each case
- **Pay and rations.** The DfE published this year's guidance on teachers' pay and conditions following last month's Review Body announcement
- **Funding and outcomes.** The DfE published an assessment of the impact of school funding on pupil outcomes over the last Parliament suggesting a limited relationship, more statistically significant at KS2 than at KS4
- **Character building.** The DfE reported on some commissioned research looking into how schools were tackling the issue of developing character skills in pupils, finding most (97%) keen but restricted by pressures of time, resources and capacity
- **A rocky road.** The Education Policy Institute examined some of the issues facing less advantaged students applying for higher education noting that while progression rates varied between schools and regions, the gap between the most and the least advantaged had hardly changed in recent years

Tweets(s) of the week

- "We support CPD but I expect any professional to make time for development regardless. Blaming workload is a cop-out" - @ipryce
- "After sitting 28 GCSE papers in 4 weeks I was left thinking: what was the point of all that?" - @SchoolsImprove



Pearson

- “No, but I’ve worked on a sheep farm where I wrangled sheep, castrated lambs, tagged them, docked their tails...” [@amanda_spielman](#)
- “We should be preparing kids for desks that haven’t been invented yet” - [@tombennett71](#)
- “FE students are the untapped resource we need to plug skill shortages but universities ignore them” - [@GdnHigherEd](#)

Other stories of the week

- The financial crisis 10 years on. Many leading economic commentators have been reflecting on the financial crash of 2007 and how things now look ten years on. According to Torsten Bell who was working at the Treasury at the time and is now Director of the Resolution Foundation, we have, to misquote the famous Churchill line, failed to turn the crisis into a positive. In a [blog](#) on the Foundation’s website, he cites living standards, housing, technical education and working conditions among the features that should have emerged out of the crisis, transformed and improved for the future but which have failed to do so.
- The wrong 5-a day. Leading education commentator and blogger Greg Ashman blogged this week about common mistakes made by school leaders that often result in making a good school worse. He listed five: blaming teachers for poor student behaviour; focusing on fashionable project-based learning; trying to measure generic skills; chasing the latest fad; concentrating on the furniture rather than the learning. The full blog is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “A lot of decision-making is not based on evidence but on hunch” – former Schools Minister David Laws and now Executive Chair at the Education Policy Institute, reflects on his time in the DfE
- “We value our EU colleagues and want them to stay” – the Russell Group of universities sets out a 10-point list of issues that need clarifying to ensure EU staff and students remain welcome post-Brexit
- “I just thought this has got totally out of hand” – Lord Adonis defends his recent assault on the current fee and salary system in HE
- “A giant glitter globe” - the incoming President of the Association of Colleges assesses the post-16 landscape
- “You wouldn’t let an 8-year old eat a double cheeseburger and fries every day of the year, so it’s important children aren’t left to use smart phones, computers or tablets without agreed boundaries” – the Children’s Commissioner warns that children could binge out on social media in the same way as can happen with junk food
- “I just hope fewer of them will be auditioning for Bob the Builder” – Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman hopes more schools will be able to go out on school trips without having to wear high-vis tops and hard hats
- “I think it’s a good thing” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton welcomes the fact that this year, in an effort to help reduce student anxiety, grade boundaries won’t be published ahead of results days



Pearson

Number(s) of the week

- £129bn. How much the global edtech market is reckoned to be worth by 2020 according to a report in The Guardian
- 85%. How many top FTSE companies in a recent survey by the FT and ICSA Boardroom Bellwether highlighted cyber risk as one of their top corporate concerns
- 16.5Mbps. The average UK broadband speed, one of the slowest across the EU according to a new report by Cable.co.uk
- 58. How many serving heads of state or government were educated in UK universities and colleges, more than any other country, according to a new report by the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- 84%. The satisfaction rating for their courses overall as indicated by those students who responded to the latest National Student Survey
- 74%. The number of young people in a poll commissioned by the Sutton Trust who said they were likely to go on to university, a 0.3% drop on last year
- 24%. How many students who had been on free school meals at age 15 entered university in 2014/15 aged 19 (compared to 41% non-free school meal students) according to the latest DfE data
- 50+. How many industry experts, the DfE is hoping to recruit to its panels to help develop T-Level content in four sectors according to the latest recruitment advert published by the Centre for Public Appointments
- 19.3. How many months behind their peers disadvantaged students were at the time of taking GCSEs last year according to research from the Education Policy Institute
- Nearly 2m. How many young people aged 16-24 spent at least some time as NEET (not in education, employment or training) at some point last year with the number spending more than a year as NEET up on the previous year, according to a new report from Impetus PEF
- 0,046-0.062. The impact of a 1% change in funding on the proportion of KS2 pupils achieving at least L4 in 2015, according to recent funding research from the DfE
- 42%. How many Brits tend to shout or speak more slowly as opposed to trying out the local language when holidaying abroad, according to research published by the British Council

What to look out for next week

- A' level results day (Thursday)