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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 10 February 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

Some big ticket items this week and some bits on schools.

The big ticket items first starting with the economy, a hot topic at present with the Spring Budget under a month away, MPs rushing to defend their local schools as the schools funding consultation heads into its final lap and reports continuing to paint a mixed picture on the future of the UK economy. This week for instance, PwC reported that with a fair wind and some substantial trade deals, the UK could emerge from Brexit as the fastest-growing economy in the G7 while the Institute for Fiscal Studies, though acknowledging modest growth, warned of increased reductions in spending on public services.

It's this reduction in public service spending that's worrying many in education. It was something that the CBI highlighted it in its Budget submission to the Chancellor this week calling on him 'to protect education spending in real terms in every year of this Parliament.' The submission singles out a number of education and skill particulars in need of support, including 16-18 provision, STEM support, careers, apprenticeships and R/D and given education was left largely untouched in the Autumn Statement, it'll be interesting to say if the Chancellor has any more room for manoeuvre in a few weeks' time.

Second on the big ticket front, a four-lettered word attracting considerable attention: work, and how it's likely to shape up as robots, automation and artificial intelligence (AI) creep ever nearer. "Pretty much anything that requires 10 seconds of thinking or less can be done by AI" claimed one Google executive recently and this week we've seen reports from McKinsey, the think tank Reform and the RSA variously offering their futuristic thoughts on the future of work as we know it.

The Reform report, listed below, is perhaps the most immediate as it looks at public sector employment in areas like the civil service, health, education and policing over the next 15 years. It's a challenging read and argues that ultimately better outcomes and efficiency depend on the increasing automation of some functions. McKinsey list five factors that could affect how quickly automation is adopted including cost, feasibility, economic benefits, labour market dynamics and regulatory and social acceptance. It also offers a revealing chart of which occupations could be affected first...education is low down but this is a big topic.

Finally back to Planet Earth and a couple of school items this week. First, science and in particular science practicals which pupils would like more of and some disadvantaged pupils get less of according to a report from the Wellcome Trust. And second, arts subjects which according to a report from the New Schools Network, haven't suffered from the introduction of the EBacc as many had feared. Links to both reports are listed below and offer a further reminder that learning needs to tick curiosity not just boxes.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Transition period is needed for apprenticeship levy, says CBI.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Pupils miss out on practical science lessons.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Body cameras on trial in English schools.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Career leaders needed to boost advice in schools.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Support staff plugging more teaching gaps.' ([Friday](#)).

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Budget build-up](#). The CBI submitted its wish-list for the Chancellor ahead of the forthcoming Budget with improved educational attainment and skill levels featuring prominently including in particular: careers, STEM, Opportunity Areas and skills training
- [More Budget build-up](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) issued its respected annual 'Green Budget' economic assessment and summary of issues ahead of next month's Budget suggesting modest growth but continued austerity
- [Digital transformation](#). The government launched its digital transformation strategy promising speeded up verification systems and digital skills training to encourage more public services to be digitalized by 2020 and beyond
- [Smarter, leaner, automated](#). The Reform think tank published a futuristic review of the public sector workforce suggesting that digitalization and automation could increasingly improve outcomes and efficiencies in areas such as health, education and policing over the next decade or so
- [The Long View](#). The consulting company PWC offered its thoughts on how the global economic order is likely to change by 2050 suggesting that blips apart the UK will remain in the top ten world economies, China will remain the world's largest economy, and Vietnam, the Philippines and Nigeria the fastest growing economies
- [More on Gen Z](#). The Varkey Foundation published the results of its latest global citizenship survey of 15 - 21 yr olds showing UK young people ranking low on mental wellbeing but high on compassion and with young people generally valuing education but concerned about issues such as conflict and terrorism.

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- [Asset sales](#). The government confirmed that it intended to start the process of selling off part of the English student loan book, initially only for loans which entered repayment between 2002 and 2006 and with no changes to existing terms and conditions
- [Access agreements](#). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) published its access agreement guidance for universities and colleges for 2018/19 highlighting what's expected of the sector in helping raise school attainment through outreach work, school sponsorship and investment
- [The AP route](#). The HE Statistics Agency (HESA) reported that over 52,000 people, generally aged 30+ and taking first degree or HND/HNC courses were enrolled at alternative providers (APs) last year



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- **OfS Chair.** The government announced Sir Michael Barber as its preferred candidate for the post of Chair of the new Office for Students (OfS).

FE/Skills

- **Apprenticeship analysis.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) examined the government's case for reform of apprenticeships in its latest Green Budget raising questions about the claimed returns on investment in apprenticeships and the potential dampening effect of the levy on wages and profits
- **Bridge into Construction.** Build UK and the College Collab Group announced plans to pilot a one-year construction course intended to provide a dedicated route into the industry ahead of the government's Skills Plan.

Schools

- **Practical science.** The Wellcome Trust published the results of its first Science Education Tracker showing that many young people were positive about learning science but over half wanted more practical activities in lessons
- **More on Practical Science.** The Wellcome Trust and Gatsby Foundation invited bids from researchers and other interested parties for 3 year grants to look at innovative ways of assessing practical science in schools and colleges
- **Two cultures.** The New Schools Network reported on its analysis of the EBacc on GCSE arts trends concluding that despite popular conception, there had been no decrease in arts GCSEs taken over the last 5 years and that combining arts subjects with the EBacc was having a positive effect on performance (although it did recognize government messaging on the importance of the arts could be better)
- **Global Gaps.** The Sutton Trust reported on its analysis of the recent PISA test results in reading, maths and science arguing that bright but disadvantaged pupils in the UK were lagging behind their more advantaged peers
- **Grade boundaries.** Ofqual issued a blog about the dangers of trying to predict grade boundaries for the new GCSEs this summer
- **Safer Internet Day.** The Safer Internet Centre published a new survey of young people's use of the internet and social media to mark this year's Safer Internet Day showing that while many have been inspired by online photos and images, nearly 50% have been worried or scared by some of the images and comments posted
- **Still waiting.** The TES listed nine consultations, including those on children's mental health and the adoption of the EBacc, that are still awaiting an official government response, in some cases for well over a year
- **State of RE.** The National Association of RE Teachers along with the RE Council launched a survey on the provision of RE in schools, how many pupils were taking exams in it, how many trained teachers were teaching it and so on
- **To Miss with Love.** The high-profile head teacher Katherine Birbalsingh offered her thoughts on leadership in a new blog listing three features in particular: being passionate about a vision; holding the line even when the chips are down; and, being able to inspire transformative action.



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Tweet(s) of the week

- “Anyone who sincerely believes academia is a meritocracy must be either deluded or in denial” - [@ChrisParrTHE](#)
- “Govt has made poor case for apprenticeships: cites collapse in employee’s training but better measures imply only slight fall” - [@ThelfS](#)
- “The traditional multipurpose university has had its day. The traditional university is being unbundled” [@JG_THE](#)
- “More than a quarter of primary children can’t do joined up handwriting” - [@SchoolsImprove](#).

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- Diamond shaped. The Reform report on the future nature of the public sector workforce recommends that increasingly organisations should adopt a diamond shaped format but just what is this? It’s not a new concept and as the name implies, suggests less hierarchical structures, more people working in the ‘flatter’ core of the organization on interrelated tasks, fewer admin staff at one end and fewer supervisory managers at the other end, and specialists feeding in where required. It’s being adopted in organisations such as HMRC.
- E7 countries. Many people have heard of the G7 countries, the dominant global economic powers which include the US, UK and others but perhaps fewer are aware of the E7 countries, those countries likely to become the dominant global economic powers over the next 30 years or so. According to the consultants PWC in its recent report into the global economy by 2050, these E7 countries are projected to include: China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Russia, Mexico and Turkey.

Quote(s) of the week

- “Something has gone very badly wrong with the Minister’s plans” – MPs confront the Education Secretary about the school funding reforms
- “Well although bits of it won’t necessarily see the light of day, I think the White Paper” – former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan highlights her highest achievement
- “I’m afraid this argument just doesn’t hold water” – the Director of OFFA dismisses claims that the university sector can’t do more to help improve access for those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- “We now have the highest number of apprenticeships on record in our island’s history at 899,000 with more than 780,000 starts since May 2015” – the Skills Minister responds to MP’s questions about the current state of apprenticeships
- “CBI members remain of the view that the timescale and design of the Apprenticeship levy pose big risks for employers to manage” – the CBI suggests employers remain wary about the apprenticeship levy
- “We need to articulate the value of cultural education in the language of life chances and exam results” – the Minister for Digital and Culture with one perspective on how to support the arts in schools
- “We can’t tell you what the temperature will be on 24 August this year but we can tell you that 70% of 16 yr old students in England will achieve a grade 4 or above” – Ofqual warns against trying to predict grade boundaries ahead of the new GCSEs



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- “I love to play especially with lego. I also am very good at explaining things because I love to talk” – a 10 year applies for the post of Lego Professorship recently advertised at the University of Cambridge.

Number(s) of the week

- 250,000. The number of public sector workers who could see their jobs or part of them automated over the next 15 years according to a new report from the think tank Reform
- 37.7%. The number of teachers in a survey by the TES who said they would wear a body camera in school if need be
- 58%. The number of GCSE science students who wanted more practical activities in their science lessons according to a new survey commissioned by the Wellcome Trust
- 48%. The number of pupils in state funded schools who took at least one arts GCSE last year, up from 44.7% in 2012, according to a report from the New Schools Network
- 84%. The number of 8-17 yr olds who have shared a photo online with 1 in 6 doing so in the last hour, according to new research from the UK Safer Internet Centre
- 84%. The number of 11 yr olds, in a survey conducted by the mental health charity Place2Be, who think it's very important that children are kind to each other
- 60. The number of Relate counsellors (about a fifth) who are having to help clients who have fallen out over Brexit according to a report in The Guardian.

What to look out for next week

- Half term and Parliament in recess.