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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 24 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

A lot to catch up on this week topped off by the youngster in Ohio who was struggling so much with her maths homework that she rang her local police dept for help. They dutifully responded but got one of the answers wrong; it can happen to us all, that's why MPs don't often answer maths questions on TV.

But back to weighty domestic matters where school funding, teacher recruitment, primary assessment, skills developments and HE funding have all been in the news. Story links below but here are some details.

School funding first where the temperature continues to rise as the consultation on a new national funding formula enters its final few weeks. The government claims that the new formula will help spread the jam a bit more fairly but it will leave schools in some areas with reduced budgets and all at a time when, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies has pointed out, cuts to public spending are continuing.

At a Westminster Hall debate this week, one MP even likened the reforms to the poll tax. An alternative point of view has been voiced by Sir Michael Wilshaw who argued that after years of largesse, schools needed to tighten their belts like everyone else. The issue was given an added twist this week with the publication of the NAO report on the levels of funding needed for the school fabric, £6.7bn at a conservative glance and the suggestion that providing for free schools was adding to the pressures. The Chancellor is already under pressure but many schools will be tuning in when he presents his Budget in a few weeks.

Teacher recruitment and retention next where this week the Education Committee reprimanded the government for failing to hit targets and for the lack of a long-term plan to improve things. Two headlines stood out of the Committee's report. First, the lack of regional data, particularly important given how different the picture is in different regions. And second, a welcome recognition that a lot more needs to be done to support teacher retention, partly at a national level but also partly at an institutional level.

Next primary assessment, the subject of an important inquiry by the Education Committee which this week took evidence from the Minister, Ofqual and the Testing Agency. The sessions covered last year's tests, baseline measures (DfE to consult shortly,) the removal of levels, training and the future (no new testing before 2018/19 apart from the introduction of multiplication checks for 11 year olds.) A live video of the proceedings can be found [here](#).

Finally this week, HE funding where HEFCE picked up its penultimate annual funding letter (it sublimates into the OfS and UKRI from April 2018.) The priorities and indeed the funding totals remain much the same as previously but the references to school support and the Industrial Strategy reflect the changes ahead.

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Pearson

Top headlines this week

- ‘Teachers fall down graduate pay league table.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Teacher shortage getting worse, say MPs.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Billions needed to restore school buildings to satisfactory condition.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Schools must help students choose BTEC quals most valued, says new report.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Almost a third of university academics from outside the UK.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Brexit on science and research](#). The Government issued its response to the Science and Technology Committee’s Inquiry into the impact of Brexit on science and R/D listing the work it was doing to ‘protect’ science and R/D and stressing that it remained one of the key principles in future negotiations
- [Navigating Brexit](#). The Institute of Directors considered government options and key priorities for business in a new report on Brexit listing three wishes in particular: no 2nd referendum; an extended transition period if necessary; scenario planning to start on trade deals
- [Skilling up for the digital economy](#). The Coalition for a Digital Economy (Coadec) examined the skills and investment needed for new tech start-ups and business growth raising concerns about shortages in three skill areas in particular: basic skills; STEM; and software development
- [Manufacturing up](#). The CBI reported continuing demand for UK manufactured goods in its latest Industrial Trends Survey, with output expected to increase over coming months although with prices also expected to rise
- [Fueling the manufacturing fire](#). The Centre for Policy Studies listed ten proposals, including avoiding government-led strategies and reviewing the role of UTCs, to help improve the competitiveness of UK manufacturing in a Paper for the National Manufacturing Conference
- [Gig review](#). Sheeta Gill of Gill HR Consultancy reported on some of the arguments for (choice, flexibility) and against (low pay, job insecurity) the gig economy at the opening session of Matthew Taylor’s review into modern employment practices

HE

- [Funding grant for 2017/18](#). The government issued its funding grant and listed priorities for the sector for the 2017/18 financial year, broadly the same as currently but with a new emphasis on the Industrial Strategy, the Institute for Coding, the Teaching Excellence Framework
- [Brexit Group](#). The government published the terms of reference and membership details of the working group set up to consider the impact of Brexit on research and innovation
- [Essay mills](#). The HE Minister called on universities to do more to stop students resorting to buying essays on line, calling for new guidance to be made available for the start of the 2017/18 year and for QAA to clamp down on the advertising of essay websites



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- **The BTEC route into HE.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) reported on the importance of the BTEC route into HE particularly for those from low participation areas but given that numbers were still low in selective universities called for clearer entry guidance and strengthened external moderation to ease transition
- **Ladder and lifeline.** University Alliance published a report on lifelong and part-time learning recommending among other things the re-introduction of lifelong learning accounts, more flexible forms of provision and broadening the apprenticeship levy to help stem the drop in p/t learners
- **Q-step centres.** The Nuffield Foundation announced it would work with the National Numeracy Challenge in a pilot programme to help develop the numerical skills of students at dedicated Q-step or quantitative social science degree centres
- **Met online.** Manchester Met University announced a new 10-yr partnership with Pearson to develop and deliver new online postgrad courses with the first three due to launch from this Sept

FE/Skills

- **More than an apprenticeship levy.** The IPPR think tank issued a report on the adult skill system over the next decade or so highlighting a number of weaknesses and calling on the government to extend the apprenticeship levy into a dedicated skills levy to help strengthen the wider adult skills base
- **Diversity Champions.** The government announced the creation of a new MP chaired Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) designed to help meet diversity targets by 2020
- **Apprenticeships for Northern Growth.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) highlighted the importance of apprenticeships for growth in the North (where apprenticeship numbers are growing) but also some of the concerns by employers in a Paper for the Northern Powerhouse Conference
- **SME push.** The government launched a new drive to encourage small businesses to take on apprentices as part of its Get In Go Far campaign
- **Industry Training Boards.** The government launched consultation on the effectiveness of the Construction and Engineering Training Boards particularly in the light of the impending apprenticeship levy
- **19-25 SEND.** The government published its latest guidance on managing entitlements for 19 – 25 yr olds with special educational needs

Schools

- **Teacher recruitment and retention.** The Education Committee published the results of its inquiry into this long standing issue noting many familiar issues such as workload, accountability (too much) and CPD (too little) but also how important job satisfaction and work life balance were when it came to teacher retention
- **Capital costs.** The National Audit Office (NAO) raised concerns about the growing burden of maintaining school buildings, increased school places and costs of free schools in a new report on capital funding
- **F40 fuming.** The F4 Group, which represents over 40 of the poorest funded local authorities, briefed MPs about their concerns about the impact of the proposed new funding formula raising particular concerns about the deprivation weighting and the application of the funding floor percentage



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- **Performance tables.** The DfE published the listing of Applied General and Technical quals approved for 2019 performance tables and due for first teaching from Sept 2017
- **Closing the numeracy gap.** The Fair Education Alliance published a report into how to improve numeracy levels for children from deprived backgrounds recommending among other things a dedicated support programme for early years, better parental engagement and clearer evidence of what works
- **Multiplication checks.** The Schools Minister confirmed that the government intends to introduce times table checks for 11 year olds in 2019

Tweet(s) of the week

- “Taking work home is deadly” - [@personneltoday](#)
- “New acronym: SMAC (smart, mobile, analytics and cloud) ecosystem of four technologies driving innovation” - [@LouisMMCoiffait](#)
- “The anxiety that marred every birthday and every special moment has melted now I’ve left teaching” - [@teshelen](#)
- “

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 14 or 16. The recent spat between the two previous Education Secretaries Lord Baker and Michael Gove over the profile of UTCs has raised once again the traditional debate in this country about at what age young people should embark on a more skills-influenced curriculum: 14 or 16? Broadly Lord Baker is for the former, Michael Gove for the latter. The 14 v 16, academic v technical curriculum has been picked up in an article on the conservativehome [webpage](#) this week which comes down on the Gove side
- Reading ages. A recent study into ‘what kids are reading 2017’ reported that primary school kids tended to read more challenging books for their age level than secondary school kids. In fact, once young people entered secondary school, their reading age tended to go into reverse, so much so that by the time they reached GCSE, their reading age might be 2-3 years below their chronological age. Various theories have been suggested for this ranging from growing up, to the attraction of other interests, to the pressure of exams. For what it’s worth, the top three most read books in primary in order are: ‘The Twits,’ ‘Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School,’ and ‘Gangsta Granny.’ J.K. Rowling is also in there. And the top three in secondary: ‘Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Old School,’ ‘Gangsta Granny,’ and ‘Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules’

Quote(s) of the week

- “There is no pot of money under my desk” – the Chancellor issues a spoiler alert ahead of next month’s Budget
- “I’m not going to mess about on the issue” – a senior Tory backbench MP prepares to defend his constituency over potential funding cuts arising from the schools funding reforms



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- “It was in our manifesto in 2015. We think times tables are a very important part of mathematical knowledge” – the Schools Minister makes the case for the introduction of times tables tests for 11 yr olds
- “There is something particularly patronizing and demoralizing about sitting in a room answering the same questions you were given as practice papers when you were 14” – The Coalition for a Digital Economy (Coadec) comes out against resit English and maths GCSEs
- “Holding fire on major policy changes and allowing a longer lead-in for government initiatives” – the Chair of the Education Committee suggests two ways that might help ease the burden on teachers
- “Be nice to caretakers – they are the gatekeepers and know everything” – one of ten top tips for new teachers listed in the TES

Number(s) of the week

- 10th. Education slips down the list of voter priorities (from 5th at the 2015 general election) according to the latest Ipsos MORI poll which saw the NHS, Brexit and immigration as the top three listed concerns
- 5,000. The number of new jobs Amazon is said to be creating in Britain this year according to Technology News
- 14%. How much self-employment has grown over the last five years according to a new pamphlet for the Social Market Foundation by Rachel Reeves MP and others
- £328m. How much the UK economy could lose if migrants downed tools for just one day according to research published by the New Economics Foundation
- 24. How many more years it could take before the gender pay gap is closed according to consultants PwC
- £3.5bn. How much the government has allocated for HE in England for 2017/18
- 76,810. The number of advanced learner loans applied for between August 2016 and the end of January 2017 according to the latest DfE statistics
- 11.3%. The overall NEET rate for 16-24 year olds in England at the end of last year (slightly down on the previous year) according to latest government statistics
- £6.7bn. How much it would cost to return all school buildings to a satisfactory or better condition according to the National Audit Office (NAO)
- 420,000. How many new school places will be needed between now and 2021 according to the (NAO) report
- 48%. How many secondary teachers have had 10 or more years’ experience compared to 64% in many other countries raising questions about retention and experience according to the Education Committee
- $(90+27) + (29+15) \times 2$. A question in the maths homework that a 10 year old in Ohio couldn’t do and asked her local police dept to help her with (which they also got wrong.) The answer should read 205

What to look out for next week

- IfS report on Education Spending across the Life Cycle in England (Monday)
- FE Week launches its ‘Save our Adult Education’ campaign (Monday)

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