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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 13 January 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

“Thank you for everything. My last ask is the same as my first. I’m asking you to believe - not in my ability to create change but yours.”

President Obama’s rousing words in his valedictory speech as US President provide a welcome uplift to what has been another week facing up to some difficult issues. More on President Obama and his education legacy later but first what about those difficult issues where this week, three have stood out: mental health; young people’s wellbeing; HE and the future.

Mental health formed a core part of the Prime Minister’s ‘shared society’ speech on Monday, the first of what is intended to be a series of Monday morning policy announcements (housing next week, industrial strategy the week after) intended to demonstrate the PM’s commitment to reform at home while Brexit hogs the headlines. Predictably the speech attracted mixed headlines; some praised the PM for highlighting the issue, others questioned whether it would solve anything: ‘all flash, no cash’ as one headline had it. For policy wonks, the [blog](#) from the Institute for Government on how to get such policies off the ground is worth a look (conduct a review, put someone in charge, link to key mechanisms.)

The PM’s speech is [here](#) and the section on mental health includes five headline action points which may be worth holding on to: a CQW/Ofsted review of support in schools; a review by Lord Stephenson and Paul Farmer of mental wellbeing in the workplace; more support and some funding for communities; greater investment in digital mental health services; improving the culture around mental health.

On an equally sober note, the Prince’s Trust this week released the latest in its annual survey of the wellbeing of young people, 16-25 year olds coping with various challenges. This was the eighth such survey and worryingly revealed young people at their lowest ebb over the eight years with concerns about feeling trapped, confused, never being able to find a job or a home and generally anxious or in worst case scenarios, plain helpless all evident. It’s no wonder the plight of young people remains high up the agenda.

Third, it’s been an important week for HE with the Bill starting what’s thought to be a difficult passage through the Lords, the Education Committee hosting a witness session on the impact of Brexit on the sector and the HE Policy Institute providing what is the first detailed sift through the runes of what might happen to student numbers post Brexit. HE is closest to the eye of the storm when it comes to Brexit and education and it’s fair to say the mood is apprehensive. Nick Hillman’s [article](#) in the Guardian sums it up well.

Finally President Obama’s [report card](#) on his education agenda covering everything from the Common Core to Race to the Top. It’s headed ‘Giving Every Student a Fair Shot,’ arguably a leitmotif for the week.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Half of young people so troubled they can’t focus at school, study finds.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Number of children taught in large classes trebles.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Government examines reforms to school admissions system to improve social mobility.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Oxford academics warning of Brexit disaster.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Most parents and students don’t understand new numerical GCSE grades.’ ([Friday](#)).

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Burning injustice](#). The Prime Minister set out plans to tackle what she called ‘the burning injustice of mental illness,’ announcing a number of initial steps starting in schools and continuing throughout life with a further Green Paper on young people’s mental health issues promised
- [Anxious and alone](#). The Prince’s Trust published the results of its annual survey on the wellbeing of young people finding them at their lowest point for eight years and increasingly concerned about issues such as housing, jobs, control (or lack of) over their own lives and family life generally
- [Global risks](#). The latest Global Risk Report, released to accompany next week’s gathering of world economic leaders at Davos, listed five global challenges facing the world in 2017 (reviving economic growth; reforming market capitalism; facing up to the importance of identity and community; managing technological change; strengthening global cooperation).

HE

- [Brexit and HE](#) (1.) The Education Committee heard some fairly gloomy prognosis as it hosted a witness session on the impact of Brexit on HE at the University of Oxford
- [Brexit and HE](#) (2.) The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) along with Kaplan and London Economics reported on their modelling of international student trends post Brexit arguing that some UK universities could recoup any drop in EU students with potential increases in non EU students but that much depended on future government policy and economic performance
- [HE Bill](#). The Times Higher and Wonkhe reported on the early stages of the Bill’s passage through the Lords where it immediately ran into controversy with a government defeat on the first of many Opposition amendments
- [HERB concerns](#). The University and College Union (UCU) published the results of its survey of academics about the HE and Research Bill (HERB) revealing considerable concerns about opening up the provider market and other aspects of the Bill as well as the potential impact of Brexit on the profession
- [Trends over time](#). The HE Statistics Agency (HESA) released a range of stats and data on student enrolments and qualifications achieved in UKHE for 2015/16 showing among other things a continuing upward trend in first degree enrolments, little change in postgrad enrolments but a drop in enrolments for other degrees and some p/t study



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- **Speedier degrees.** The government was said to be considering flexible fee caps to encourage the development of 2-yr speedier degrees, following advice from the Competition and Markets Authority.

FE/Skills

- **Skills system north of the border.** The think tank IPPR with support from the FE Trust for Leadership (FETL) reported on the skills challenge in Scotland, highlighting ten issues and six priorities for the future starting with a clearer national ambition and purpose for the skills system as a whole
- **Review outcomes.** The government published the first of a series of reports from Wave 3 area reviews covering parts of the Midlands, Liverpool, Hampshire and Cumbria showing which colleges are recommending going it alone, which merging and which forming other partnerships
- **Better late.** The government issued a set of customer service principles for area reviews as the process moved into its final stages.

Schools

- **Mental health.** The PM outlined a number of measures intended to help schools as part of her speech this week including more training for staff, a major thematic review and a new Green Paper
- **KS2 data.** The DfE published updated data on the 2016 KS2 assessments showing more detail on pupil characteristics and the percentage of schools falling under the new coasting criteria
- **SEND funding.** The DfE published local authority allocations for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) funding for 2017/18
- **We don't need no (compulsory) sex education.** MPs opted not to support compulsory 'age-appropriate' sex and relationship education in schools when the proposal came before the Children and Social Work Bill Committee
- **Effective governance.** The DfE issued an updated handbook for school governance with its six key features of effective governance built into a new competency framework
- **Theatre trips.** The Education Endowment Foundation along with the RSA and Arts Council England invited bids for a new project looking into identifying the benefits of theatre trips and other arts based activities that could enhance cultural learning.

Tweet(s) of the week

- "AI is the new TA in the classroom" - [@laurie_forcier](#)
- "Everyone @ucas_online on full alert this week. We expect to process c.150,000 applicants making c.400k applications in this deadline week" - [@MaryCurnockCook](#)
- "Lords debate: Baroness Deech says of TEF's quest for 'uniformity' in teaching that Sir Isaiah Berlin's power point wouldn't have been up to scratch" [@ JG_THE.](#)



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Word or phrase(s) of the week

- **Sandbox.** A term that has developed from computer language and which refers to a safe space in which to test out innovative products and services. Many people are calling for a 'regulatory sandbox' to allow for a more innovative approach to the school curriculum.
- **Snowflake students.** The term 'snowflake,' whether applied to an individual or to a group of people, emerged as one of the listed words of the year last year. It can be used either positively as in 'my little snowflake' or negatively as in 'people who lack resilience and are quick to take offence.' It has cropped up again this week in its more negative connotation in discussions about the HE Bill.

Quote(s) of the week

- "I want us to employ the power of government as a force for good to transform the way we deal with mental health problems right across society and at every stage of life" – the PM positions the government to take a lead role in tackling issues such as mental illness
- "A generation who feel their ability to shape their own future is slipping away from them" – the chief executive of the Prince's Trust summarises the despair felt by many young people surveyed in the Trust's latest Youth Index
- "It's taking more time because of the high number of responses received" – the DfE explains why it's taking such a long time to respond to last year's EBacc consultation
- "It would probably be the biggest disaster for the university sector in many years" – a university vice-chancellor doesn't hold back in giving evidence to the Education Committee's session on Brexit and HE
- "In my mind, the Institute for Apprenticeships (IFA) is a bit like NICE is for the NHS – but for FE, deciding which skills medicines the country needs and how we should pay for them" – the Apprenticeship Partner Director at Kaplan reflects on the role of the IFA
- "it's been an unwise indulgence in what I would see as political peccadillos" – Labour MP and former head teacher Nick Dakin in a debate on 16-19 funding, calls into question government spending on favoured political projects at a time when funding is tight
- "I remember considerable nervousness, considerable anxiety" – Ofsted's (new) Chief Inspector on being on the receiving end of an Ofsted inspection in a former life
- "Many of us who were early pioneers saw – and see – ourselves as part of a reform movement for the whole education system. The structural reforms took us to the starting line. Now, we need a second revolution in how and what we teach" – Trust Chief Exec and founder of 'Parents and Teachers for Excellence' Rachel De Souza spies the next stage of the revolution in schools
- "The plain fact is that schools, or any other public service favoured by politicians will thrive for three reasons (money, focus, attention)" - Jonathan Simons reminds schools that sometimes being under the government's watchful eye does have some dividends
- "Be Nice, Queue Up, Put the Bins Out" – the three basic tenets of British society that incomers apparently need to recognize according to the government's integration tsar.



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Number(s) of the week

- 1 in 4. The number of people who may suffer from a common mental disorder at some point in their lives according to figures quoted by the Prime Minister
- 46%. The number of young people who had problems at schools and who didn't talk to anyone about them because they didn't want anyone to know or think anyone could help, according to the latest Youth Index survey for the Prince's Trust
- 248 to 221. The size of the vote against the government as it was defeated on the first amendment to the HE Bill in the House of Lords
- 81%. The number of academics who expressed concerns about opening up access to degree – awarding powers and a university title for new HE providers according to a survey by UCU
- £2bn pa. The amount of money the economy could lose if new rules were introduced preventing new, non-EU students from coming to study at UK universities, according to a new report from the HE Policy Institute
- £37. The drop in the amount of funding per pupil in England this year once inflation and class sizes have been taken into account, according to analysis by BBC News
- 477. The number of primary schools in England defined as meeting the government's new coasting criteria, according to the latest figures from the Dept
- £350. The amount of money the average office worker spends a year on teas and coffees, cards and presents and other incidentals such as sponsorships and secret Santa according to research by Nationwide.

What to look out for next week

- Keynote speech by the Prime Minister on Brexit (Tuesday)
- World Economic Forum at Davos (Tuesday – Friday)
- Education Committee evidence session on primary assessment (Wednesday)
- Publication of KS4/5 performance tables (Thursday)
- Inauguration of the new US President (Friday).