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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 20 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

A sense of apprehension if not era change has gripped the headlines this week as a new, unconventional President is installed in America, a new 12-point plan for leaving the EU is announced in the UK and world leaders gather to thrash out global issues in Davos. As Winston Churchill once wrote: "There's nothing wrong with change - if it's in the right direction;" the question worrying many is just whether it is all in the right direction or not.

Back home, the week has seen the publication of a range of economic indicators, not all as bad as feared although the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) report on public finances paints a pretty grim picture on the future direction of borrowing and debt. As for education, four developments stand out this week: performance tables; opportunity areas, primary assessment and that Brexit plan.

This year's school and college performance tables came with the added piquancy of some new performance measures being applied for the first time including Progress 8 for schools and the separate reporting of applied general and technical qualifications for post-16 students. It means comparisons with previous years are unhelpful. Broadly the results are not greatly different from the interim results posted last autumn but by way of headlines, it's clear that the new measures are having an impact on the hierarchy of subjects being adopted by schools while English and maths resits remain a concern for post-16 learning. The [Times Ed](#), [Schools Week](#) and [Education Datalab](#) all offer detailed analysis and helpful summaries of the data.

Opportunity Areas were first outlined in her Conference speech by the Education Secretary last autumn. The concept of channelling support and attention to key disadvantaged areas round the country with the aim of increasing opportunity and performance is not new, think Labour's Education Action Zones, but the political imperatives now are slightly different: improving social mobility; focusing on the just-managing; preparing young people for life outside the EU. The government is hoping they'll make a difference.

On assessment, the National Association of Head teachers' (NAHT) was the first out of the blocks this week in what is looking to be a year of assessment reviews, with a report of their own on primary assessment. It's a useful contribution and lays out some helpful principles for a future framework that would include some statutory assessment at the start and finish of primary but also more accessible test and more supportive approach to data. The full report is listed below.

Finally, that speech by the Prime Minister setting out the 12 principles for negotiating our exit from the EU. At least three of those principles are of direct interest to education. Two, on science and innovation and on global opportunities, positively, the other, on controlling immigration and thus potentially staff and student numbers, less so. It could be a long two years of negotiation.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Funding shake-up risks cuts in most schools, say unions.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Patchy careers advice in state schools is damaging social mobility, MPs warn.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Only 1% of parents understand Progress 8, say teachers.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'New targets see 282 secondaries failing.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'First sixth form college to reopen as academy within weeks.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [The PM's Brexit speech](#). Theresa May set out 12 negotiating principles for the UK to exit the EU in a landmark speech which confirmed that the government was working to ensure a 'smooth, orderly Brexit' to include protection for workers' rights as well as the rights of EU and UK nationals, and science and innovation but also to control immigration and leave the single market
- [Education Secretary's speech on social mobility](#). Justine Greening used a keynote speech to outline three ways (tackling geographical disadvantage, prioritizing system capacity, better careers and technical education) in which she felt the education system could help improve social mobility
- [Better Budgets](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS,) Institute for Government (IfG) and Chartered Institute of Taxation (CIOT) published a joint report on how to improve the current clunky Budget making process suggesting ten steps including clearer principles, sharper priorities, external review
- [Balancing the books](#). The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its latest 'Fiscal Sustainability Report' highlighting growing pressures on the public purse notably from rising healthcare and pension costs along with student loan debt, and concluding that the long-term picture on debt looks pretty bleak
- [NCS Bill](#). Labour MP Dan Jarvis wrote a blog praising the National Citizen Service for young people as the Bill proposing to strengthen the Scheme with a Royal Charter entered the House of Commons
- [Class Ceiling](#). The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility along with the Sutton Trust published the results of their inquiry into helping young people gain better access into the professions calling among other things for better careers advice, paid internships and more transparent recruitment practices

HE

- [What do we think of it so far?](#) The Russell Group was one of a number of university mission groups to offer a guarded welcome to the PM's Brexit speech and in particular to principle 10 on support for science and innovation in the EU and beyond
- [What do we want?](#) The NUS launched its Liber8 manifesto intended to focus campaign activity on eight areas including rising rents and fees, migrant rights, college closures and the marketization of HE
- [Prevent](#). HEFCE reported on its monitoring of the first year of the Prevent duty being adopted in HE noting that most (84%) institutions had responded 'appropriately' and implemented the requirements with 90% indicating they had staff training plans in place



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- [DAP Factsheet](#). The government added further papers to its HE reform proposals going through Parliament by spelling out in more detail the arrangements for validation and for granting Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) and University Title
- [Jan 15 deadline](#). The major deadline date in the 2017 UCAS application round was reached with wonkhe noting many institutions looking anxiously over their shoulders at prospective numbers

FE/Skills

- [2015/16 performance tables](#). The DfE updated its interim performance data for 16-18 results for 2015/16 indicating L3 attainment had remained stable but that concerns remained about performance in English/maths resits and some provider performance
- [Raising the bar](#). The Education Secretary called on the FE sector to become a self-improving sector able to improve skill levels and social mobility post-Brexit in a keynote speech this week
- [Industry expert panels](#). The DfE started advertising for 100+ (remunerated) industry experts to sit on monthly panels over the coming year and help develop occupational standards for the 15 technical routes proposed in the Sainsbury Skills Plan
- [Restructuring facility](#). The government re-issued its guidance for colleges looking to apply for financial support to help with re-structuring following an area review
- [Work placements](#). The Learning and Work Institute launched its call for evidence on challenges and best practice in work placements in technical education

Schools

- [2015/16 performance tables](#). The DfE published final performance data for 2015/16 showing an increase in EBacc take-up and average Attainment scores and the impact of the new accountability measures
- [Opportunity Areas](#). The Education Secretary announced an extension of the Opportunity Area model, doubling the number around the country to twelve and bringing in new Research Schools, to help improve opportunity and social mobility in so-called social mobility cold spots
- [The future of assessment?](#) The NAHT published its proposals for better assessment at KS1/2 setting out six principles and nine core features including statutory baseline and KS2 assessments, more accessible test, simpler reporting and a less punitive use of data
- [Safeguarding](#). Ofsted's Sean Harford blogged about the sorts of things inspectors were looking for when they inspected how schools were implementing safeguarding arrangements
- [Language difficulties](#). The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and the coms charity I CAN launched a new review into language issues experienced by primary pupils as part of a major review ten years on from the previous landmark report
- [Body image](#). The Be Real Campaign launched a new toolkit for schools to help tackle body image following research suggesting many young people lacked confidence and were being held back from sporting and other activities as a result
- [A' levels back on](#). Knowsley Council which attracted headlines last year for having to abandon offering A' levels, announced it was planning to open a dedicated A' level centre



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Tweet(s) of the week

- “It’s not the volume of testing that’s a concern but the consequences. In that sense parts of ed system are radically overtested” @russellhobby
- “Dance lessons important as English and maths, says Royal Ballet choreographer” - @SchoolsImprove
- “It’s the news that some teachers waited years to hear. Sir Michael Wilshaw is leaving the country” - @adibloom_tes

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- Progress 8. This is one of the new accountability measures being applied to this year’s performance tables for the first time but according to a recent survey very few parents understand it. Broadly it captures the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary to GCSE (Key Stage 2 – Key Stage 4.) The ‘8’ bit comes from the eight qualifications that are used to measure pupil attainment; they include English and maths (double weighted) three EBacc subjects and three other approved subjects, either academic or technical. A Progress 8 score is calculated for each pupil by comparing their achievement in these eight subjects with the average achievement of all pupils nationally who had a similar starting point. A zero score for a school means pupils on average have done as well as other comparable pupils nationally, a score above zero means pupils on average made more progress and a score below zero means less progress. 97% of schools this year were in the range -1.0 to + 0.7. Further guidance [here](#)
- Demographic transition. There’s been much discussion in recent years about the changing shape of the UK population as life expectancy increases, baby boomers (those born in the ‘50s and 60’s) start to retire and the ratio of workers to non-workers, changes. This year apparently marks an important moment in this continuing demographic transition with the number of people now not working growing faster for the first time since the 1980s recession than the number in work. The Resolution Foundation and Intergenerational Commission is doing some important work in this area and their recent report shows how traditional life stages are changing with for example younger generations leaving education later and older generations working and studying later in life, in both cases to enhance later life

Quote(s) of the week

- “Better technical education is vital in Brexit Britain” – the Education Secretary does her bit to highlight the important role technical education is likely to play in the future
- “If schools cannot command the government’s attention, what chance is there for the most neglected sector in education: skills and technical training?” - FT columnist Miranda Green on the battle to get technical training recognized
- “We are looking for professionals who are able to demonstrate sound judgement in dealing with complex issues” – the DfE draws up its Person Spec for industry experts to join its ‘Sainsbury’ panels
- “A hand grenade with the pin removed” – the Chief Exec of the AELP assesses the role of the director of assessment in the new Institute for Apprenticeships
- “Actually it adds up to much the same amount of testing as in other systems” – the new Chief Inspector attempts to allay fears about the volume of testing
- “The government is trying to slice up a cake which is too small” – ASCL Interim General Secretary Malcom Trobe condemns the government’s school funding reforms



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- “For schools this new obligation is a disaster” – Prospect magazine takes up the issue of schools having to pay the apprenticeship levy
- “I have the opportunity to go back to my roots” – Sir Michael Wilshaw comments on his new job as chief adviser to GEMS Education
- “Her charisma, her energy – it makes you feel you can take on the entire world” – a student from Tower Hamlets in East London explains what meeting Michelle Obama meant to her

Number(s) of the week

- 1.5%. The IMF’s revised prediction for UK growth in 2017, up from an earlier forecast of 1.1%
- 1.6%. The latest (December 2016) inflation rate for the UK, up from 1.2% in the previous month and the highest rate for over two years with an increase in food prices being largely to blame
- 1.6m. The number of people out of work in work in the quarter up to November 2016, down 52,000 according to the latest official figures
- 61. The number of MPs so far who have signed a petition calling on the government to support an expansion of adult education including evening classes
- 200,000. The number of new apprentices the Skills Minister is looking for the public sector to create by 2020
- 18. The number of Sixth Form Colleges said to be in official negotiation with the DfE to convert to academy status, according to the Minister concerned
- 98%. The number of schools that will see their funding reduced when the new national formula is implemented in a couple of years’ time, according to research from the unions
- 36.8%. The number of pupils in all schools who entered the EBacc in 2015/16 according to latest performance table data
- -0.13. The (negative) progress in GCSE maths by 16-8 year olds according to latest performance table data
- 36%. The number of young people (11-16 yr olds) in a recent survey who said they’d do whatever it takes including cosmetic surgery, to look good
- £6.64m pa. The amount of money being offered by the Chinese entrepreneur Charles Chen Yiden to help transform global education, making it the richest education prize currently on offer

What to look out for next week

- Government Green Paper on its industrial strategy (Monday)
- Public Accounts Committee witness session on the financial sustainability of schools (Monday)
- Supreme Court judgement on Brexit case (Tuesday)
- Education Committee evidence session on Brexit and HE (Wednesday)
- Annual BETT Show (Wed-Saturday)