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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 6 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

The start of a new year and the traditional moment to set out various hopes, fears and resolutions for the year ahead, including for the world of education.

For her part, the Prime Minister continued the theme set out by David Cameron at the start of last year by drawing attention to those struggling at the margins of society, the JAMs (just about managing) as they're now known, although Brexit was never far away. She's due to make a keynote speech on Brexit plans shortly but for the moment the message was the need to stick together: "a truly united Britain," was the call.

The Skills Minister set out his thoughts in an opinion piece in FE Week. With the apprenticeship levy coming in, area reviews finishing and the Skills Plan gathering momentum, "2017," he wrote, "is set to be a hugely significant year for apprenticeships, skills, FE and careers." And as if to underline the point, the government went on to issue for consultation its initial strategic guidance for the fledgling Institute for Apprenticeships, due to be fully operative from April and already looking to have a full in – tray with apprenticeship delivery, technical education and the forthcoming industrial strategy all jostling for its attention.

For others the glass of 2017 was variously half full or half empty.

Labour's Shadow Education Secretary saw 'a bleak outlook for schools' particularly over funding but praised teachers for battling on while the Chief Exec of the Learning and Work Institute suggested a more optimistic outlook for learning and skills. Views about the future for HE were equally mixed as the Guardian discovered when it sampled opinions. '2017 will be the year universities reconcile themselves to Brexit' suggested HEPI director Nick Hillman, 'medals for universities will cause a stir,' argued Professor Andy Westwood. Elsewhere, leading economists in the FT's annual survey of the year ahead saw growth slowing and inflation rising and on a lighter note, TES columnist John Dunford called for the government's education team to spend some time in schools to see what it's really like to cope with a constant stream of announcements.

Either way things are unlikely to slow down. Next week, for instance, the HE and FE Bills are under further scrutiny at respective committees while the government is due to say something on social reform and JAMs. The week after it's school and college 2016 league tables, the week after that it's the government's industrial strategy and BETT extravaganza while updates are expected anytime soon on the Skills Plan and the government's plans for its review of KS2 assessment.

As ever then, the year looks to be getting off to a busy start and for those looking to beat the stress, perhaps the 'no emails after 6.00 pm' mantra, suggested by one contributor to the Guardian's stress buster tips for the year and apparently being considered by some organisations might be worth a try. It could work.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Fake university degree websites closed.' (Tuesday)
- 'Institute for Apprenticeships consultation launched.' (Wednesday)
- 'Private university expansion plans a risk too far.' (Thursday)
- 'Sharp fall in complaints about Ofsted inspections.' (Friday).

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **United we stand.** The Prime Minister stressed the importance of unity and delivering for all, especially the JAMs (just about managing) in her New Year message
- **Social integration.** The MPs' cross Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration released an interim report setting out six principles including clearer strategies, local action plans, better data and compulsory ESOL classes where necessary, as a basis for improving community cohesion
- **Inheriting the earth.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies examined the issue of inherited wealth suggesting that while some people might be currently benefitting, this was not the case for all and with pensions changing and household incomes under pressure, was not likely to increase
- **Digital naivety.** The Children's Commissioner published a new report highlighting the issue of more young children using the internet but without necessary safeguards and calling as a result for compulsory digital citizenship in schools, stronger data protection and a Children's Digital Ombudsman
- **Let them not eat cake.** The dental profession launched a campaign to cut down on the workplace culture of snacking on cakes and biscuits amid fears of a rise in obesity and tooth decay.

HE

- **Risk assessment.** The HE Policy Institute published a useful report on alternative HE providers, encouraged under current proposals from government as a way of widening the market for students but where strong concerns remain about future regulation and potential risks
- **Boutique university.** Roxane Stockwell, principal of Pearson College was interviewed by the Times Higher where she outlined the current vision for the College of continuing to deliver high quality specialist courses and applying for degree awarding powers in 2017.

FE/Skills

- **Extending brief.** The government issued its proposed strategic guidance for the new Institute for Apprenticeships highlighting five core functions and twelve supporting ones and inviting comments by the end of the month
- **New Year resolutions.** The Skills Minister wrote a piece for FE Week where he listed some of his New Year resolutions including implementing apprenticeship reforms, celebrating FE, strengthening careers guidance and guiding the Technical and FE Bill through Parliament



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- **High five.** The chief executive of the Learning and Work Institute highlighted five pivotal issues (the apprenticeship levy, Brexit, devolution, social justice, the Skills Plan) that could help transform learning and skills potentially for the better this year
- **BSL instead of FS.** The government followed up work by the Maynard Review on improving access to apprenticeships for disabled people by confirming that where possible British Sign Language (BSL) will be accepted as an alternative qualification to functional skills in English.

Schools

- **Open for membership.** The Chartered College of Teaching opened for (voluntary) membership this month, two years after the blueprint for a professional college that could share and develop good practice in teaching was drawn up
- **Order, order.** Behaviour expert Tom Bennett outlines four ways (routine, practice, contract, deliver) that can help maintain order in the classroom.

Tweet(s) of the week

- “The world’s largest pencil manufacturer has had to add extra shifts to keep up with global demand for colouring pencils” - [@The Economist](#)
- “Swap cookies for cashews. Workplace cake culture blamed for rise in obesity” - [@cnbc](#)
- “#ScholarGags. Old academics never die, they just lose their faculties” - [@JohnnySRich](#)
- “If education was an experiment it would be the worst one ever designed says [@RussellHobby](#) in Sec Ed” - [@pwhenshaw](#).

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- **Virtue signalling.** A phrase coined by James Batholomew in the Spectator a couple of years ago, to indicate declaring something that sounds admirable and praiseworthy on the surface but which ultimately may have little substance. It’s a form of behaviour adopted by both politicians and individuals alike who want to demonstrate their credentials or make sweeping, often unproven claims and although many people think the term has had its day, others claim that it continues to stalk the world of education
- **Alternative providers.** The government remains keen to encourage more of these as a way of opening out higher education provision and is pushing ahead with plans to do so. The trouble is many people have reservations about them, nobody is quite sure how many there are in the UK, let alone what to call them: ‘private,’ ‘alternative,’ ‘challenger’ or whatever. This week’s pamphlet by the HE Policy Institute which has a useful chapter identifying the main characteristics of such providers, let alone some of the issues, is thus a welcome contribution to an important area of HE provision.

Quote(s) of the week

- “This is the year we need to pull down barriers that hold people back, securing a better deal at home for ordinary, working people” – the Prime Minister sets out her vision for the country in the coming year



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- “Did Thomas Cromwell write this part of the Bill?” – Oxford University Chancellor and former Conservative Party chairman Lord Patten prepares to challenge the government over its plans in the HE Bill to alter powers of revocation for University charters
- “Teachers are battling on and we must salute them for it” - Labour’s Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner offers support for teachers in her New Year message
- “Designing a regulatory system for both the traditional sector and the newcomers is a bed of nails” – one of the authors of a new pamphlet on alternative providers in HE airs concerns
- “In our view, there would be less cause for confusion if Ofqual was given the overarching role on assessment on behalf of the IfA” – the Association of Employment and Learning providers (AELP) responds to the new guidance for the Institute for Apprenticeships
- “Many teachers forget that good behaviour often has to be taught, just like any other part of the school syllabus” – behaviour expert Tom Bennett sets out some rules for classroom management
- “Justine Greening and her closest advisers (should) each spend a week, without mobile phone or pager, in a school, to experience at first hand the implementation issues of the mass of current reforms” education commentator John Dunford with a novel proposal for the New Year
- “AI (artificial intelligence) was the buzzword for 2016 and looks set to dominate in 2017 as well” – the BBC reports on the latest technology trends.

Number(s) of the week

- 45%. The number of economists in the annual FT outlook survey who reckon UK growth will slow in 2017 from around 2.1% to 1.5%
- £192.2bn. The level of personal debt in the UK, up 10% over the last year according to the Bank of England
- 31.2%. The number of Americans working in routine jobs, a fall of 9% and part of a global transition in working practices as routine jobs disappear according to research cited in The Wall St Journal
- 4.1%. The drop in the number of people particularly undergraduates applying for teacher training courses in 2016 according to latest stats from UCAS
- 20%. The number of Gen Z students (16-20 yr olds) starting university who think they might be able to secure their dream job, most (58%) are more concerned about job security according to research by EY
- £447 and £658. How much primary and secondary schools respectively with the highest number of just about managing pupils could lose under the proposed new funding plans according to calculations by two unions
- 2/3. The number of respondents who admitted to breaking a New Year resolution last year, most within the first month, according to a survey by ComRes.

What to look out for next week

- Government announcement on social reform and JAMs (Monday)
- HE Bill begins its Committee stage in the Lords (Monday)
- Education Committee public hearing at Oxford on Brexit and HE (Wednesday).

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