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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 30 June 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 important reports and a flurry of Ministerial activity this week.

Let's start with the Ministerial activity. On Monday the new Skills Minister outlined her initial thoughts on apprenticeships and skills to the AELP Conference. On Tuesday, the Education Secretary responded to education issues arising out of the Queen's Speech while on Thursday the HE Minister addressed the Festival of Higher Education. Bit by bit as these various outputs indicate, a revised agenda for education is taking shape: shorn at present of legislation and big bang announcements, focused on current core issues, under scrutiny from a more confident Opposition but anxious to make a difference where possible. This potentially is the new post-election realpolitik.

The Skills Minister's address at the start of the week was probably the nearest to this new realpolitik in that it offered a new no-nonsense approach to getting things done. Nobody's quite sure if she really is to be the new Skills Minister, this has yet to be confirmed, but Ms Milton was wasting no time: "my intention is not to come in with any bright ideas, my intention is to make it work." Her main pronouncements, helpfully summed up by FE Week [here](#), prove the point.

Justine Greening's stint at the dispatch box on Tuesday when the education bits of the Queen's Speech were being debated was perhaps further evidence that the present scenario has left her with little new to say. There were familiar commitments to technical education and Institutes of Technology, a promise that no schools would miss out under the new formula and that an announcement on funding would be made "shortly" but the big news had already been confirmed in response to an earlier written question, namely: "There was no education bill in the Queen's Speech and therefore the ban on new grammar schools will remain in place." RIP as many noted.

As to those important reports, three stand out this week, generally more reality check than realpolitik.

First social mobility, the subject of numerous commentaries this week including a coruscating report from the Social Mobility Commission on the impact of two decades of government policy on the issue. Based on an analysis of each life stage, from early years to the world of work, it argued that for all the huff and puff, things have hardly improved for the have nots. Second, school funding, also the subject of a couple of commentaries this week and where the OECD's comprehensive review of how funding operates in different schools systems offers considerable food for thought. The aspect of 'connecting funding strategies to education goals' may have caught the Treasury's eye. Finally, a fascinating report from Deloitte on challenges for UK workplaces particularly post Brexit. Concerns about skill gaps runs through it.



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Top headlines this week

- 'New Skills Minister brings welcome news as apprenticeship reforms suffer slow start.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Greening stands by manifesto pledge that no school will lose out under funding formula.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Ministers about to lift 1% cap on teachers' pay rises, reports suggest.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Schools go 'supersize' to cope with population growth.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Limiting time online won't protect children.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Citizens' status](#). The Prime Minister reported back to Parliament on the first week of Brexit negotiations and in particular on the critical issue of the future status of EU citizens in the UK for whom she set out proposals for a system of settled status for those eligible
- [Brexit business group](#). The government announced the creation of a business advisory group comprising the main business bodies such as the CBI, Chambers of Commerce and EEF to work with government on business matters related to Brexit
- [Time for a Change](#). The Social Mobility Commission examined the impact of social mobility activity over the last 20 years, finding economic and social divisions in society in danger of getting worse and suggesting a number of recommendations for government, schools and colleges to help remedy things
- [Power up](#). Deloitte launched the first in what is intended to be a series of reports looking at the challenges facing UK business and growth, in this instance focusing on the labour force where it highlighted concerns about labour shifts post Brexit and the need to fill high-skill vacancies
- [Gender pay gap](#). The DfE reported a mean pay gap of 5.3% as it became the first government dept to publish details of its gender pay and bonus gap, something all employers with 250+ employees will have to do from next April

HE

- [Access monitoring](#). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) published its latest annual report on how HE institutions were supporting access arrangements noting a significant increase in the amount of money being invested but continuing concerns about drop-out rates among mature, part-time and disadvantaged groups
- [Improving social mobility](#). The Russell Group issued a new briefing showing what steps it was taking to help improve social mobility through mentoring, outreach programmes, bursaries and so on
- [Poor universities](#). Chris Ramsey, Chair of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC,) offered his perspective on the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) exercise for HE, arguing that whatever the metrics, flawed or otherwise might tell us, we still have a world-class HE system prized by many
- [End of DLHE](#). HESA, the Higher Ed Stats Agency, published the outcomes of its extensive review of its Destinations of Leavers from HE (DLHE) survey format which has been running for many years,



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announcing a new name for the survey (the Graduate Outcomes Survey) and a new implementation plan to go with it

FE/Skills

- **What's off the job?** The government published guidance and case studies of how employers and providers could best meet the minimum 20% off-the-job training required in apprenticeships
- **The new Skills Minister's agenda.** Anne Milton made her first major speech as the new Skills Minister at the AELP Conference where she outlined both her approach and what was at the top of her list of priorities
- **Apprenticeship procurement.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) issued an update on the procurement exercise for non-levy paying employers confirming it will launch a new exercise shortly
- **Training system under scrutiny.** The Resolution Foundation published the first of a series of reviews of the skills and training system reflecting in this case on recent training data around apprenticeships noting the increase in participation but raising concerns about market volatility and the impact on other forms of training

Schools

- **Exam appeals.** Ofqual announced that following pilots last year, it will phase in a system of 'second chance' appeals in GCSE, AS and A' level exams in cases where there are concerns about marking or moderation errors
- **Mental health champions.** The government announced a new training programme, to be run by the Mental Health First Aid organization, to help train staff in schools in England to recognize and support young people with mental health disorders
- **Social media and mental health.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) examined the latest literature around social media and its impact on young people's wellbeing suggesting that public policy has failed to keep up with developments and should concentrate more on helping young people develop resilience
- **Chain Effects.** The Sutton Trust published the results of commissioned research into the performance of disadvantaged students in academies finding a mixed picture, with many doing well in sponsored academies but some higher-performing students often not making as much progress
- **MAT moves.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) continued its research series into teacher retention and turnover looking this time at multi-academy trusts where it found considerable staff movement within MATs particularly those moving to more challenging schools suggesting that a system of careful workforce planning was operating
- **The complexities of school funding.** The OECD published a new thematic report on how school funding operates in different school systems, concluding that minimum levels apart, a critical factor is how resources are allocated and applied
- **More on school funding.** The Local Government Association (LGA) provoked further debate about the merits or otherwise of a national formula by arguing that local councils should retain control over some funding to deal with local needs and circumstances



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Tweets(s) of the week

- “I don’t intend to come into the job with any new bright ideas. I’m here to make it work. To do the delivery, says new Skills Minister” - [@NickLinford](#)
- “Greening: the legislation that we need to drive up standards is already in place #Queen’s Speech” - [@tes](#)
- “A concerted vice-chancellorial spitefest might have battered a hole in the TEF” - [@Wonkhe](#)
- “The teaching isn’t the part that worries me. It’s the sheer amount of negativity surrounding the profession” - [@tes](#)
- “The inevitable next question. If MPs must no longer wear ties, why must children?” - [@miss_mcinerney](#)

Other stories of the week

- [Kind-hearted but not soft-hearted](#). This is how the UK emerges from the latest survey of British Social Attitudes conducted by the National Centre for Social Research late last year and published this week. It comes at an interesting time with concerns growing that the country is becoming more polarized and uneasy and the Social Mobility Commission describing the general public mood as ‘sour.’ In summary, we appear to be divided on immigration and Brexit, we’re increasingly socially liberal in our attitudes, we take a hard line on terrorism and crime and we’re fed up with austerity and prepared to pay a bit more tax if that’ll improve things. Further details from the 24 page report can be found [here](#)
- Ladybirds are red. So are strawberries. Why? This is one of a number of sample questions used in Oxford University’s entrance interviews, in this case for Biological Sciences. The aim is to tease out an applicant’s capacity for wider intellectual reasoning, here for example whether red is a warning or a welcoming sign. Further sample questions for different disciplines can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “Support on other matters will be agreed on a case by case basis” – the government spells out the terms of its agreement with the DUP
- “There will be no cliff edge” – the Prime Minister announces a two-year grace period to allow EU citizens in the UK to regularize their status post Brexit
- “Golden ages don’t have to be in the past” – Sir Michael Barber prepares the ground for the inception next spring of the Office for Students in HE
- “The focus on outcomes is a potential game changer which needs to change the way universities think” – Hallam Uni V.C and Chair of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) panel Chris Husbands offers his thoughts on the TEF experience from both sides of the fence
- “I am somebody who has absolutely no patience at all, I want everything done yesterday and I will only forgive not doing it yesterday if it’s an attempt to get it right” – Anne Milton, the new Skills Minister is keen to get things done
- “There is currently no prospect of the gap between poor and wealthier children being eliminated at GCSE or at A’ level. This is totally unacceptable” - the latest report from the Social Mobility Commission spells out some of the challenges around attainment for the education system



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- “A cloth ear” – what the government has displayed when it comes to the training needs of young people and traineeships according to the Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden
- “A tin ear” – what the government is demonstrating over school funding according to one union leader
- “There is a case for more grammars but instead let’s create more comps with grammar school curricula” – Toby Young argues that if there are to be no more grammars, more students should take the EBacc
- “Let’s just teach our children to be decent” – TES columnist Dorothy Lepkowska on the debate about how to teach British values

Number(s) of the week

- 36%. The number of non-British workers considering leaving within the next five years according to a new survey by Deloitte
- 1.5%. The British Chambers of Commerce growth forecast for the UK for 2017, updated from 1.4% previously
- £883.5m. How much was spent on widening participation activity in 2015/16 by institutions across the HE sector, up from £842.1m on the previous year, according to the latest report from the Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
- 68%. The proportion of FE colleges judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection according to the latest (Feb 2017) data from Ofsted, down 3% on the previous year
- £200,000. How much the government is putting in initially to support mental health training for teachers
- 110,000. The increase in the number of pupils in the school system between Jan 2016 and Jan 2017 according to census data released by the DfE
- 70%+. How many parents in the UK contribute towards the costs of their children’s education whether through fee paying schools, college or uni courses according to a survey by HSBC, more than parents generally across the world
- 27.6%. The number of children in the UK who were six or younger when they first used the internet according to research from the Education Policy Institute
- 32 out of 40. The pass mark for this year’s phonic check, the same for the last few years as confirmed by the DfE

What to look out for next week

- Learning and Work Institute ‘Into work’ Convention (Wednesday, Thursday)
- BTEC Awards Ceremony (Thursday)