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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 2 February 2018

(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 number of important reports this week and some with a bit of a kick in.

Here for instance is the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee on the government's handling of teacher shortages in its report this week: 'they seem to have watched on, scratching their heads, as more and more teachers quit the profession.' Other reports packing a punch this week include the Social Market Foundation report on the vocational route into HE, the BBC's findings on what appears to be happening to creative subjects in many schools, the Northern Powerhouse's strategy for education in the North, the Sutton Trust's report on internships, and the report from the National Children's Bureau on children missing education.

It's not all doom and gloom it should be said, there are daily stories of heroic activity in education on social media as ever but these reports collectively highlight where some of the current challenges lie. All are listed below but here's a few headlines that capture some of the core issues.

The problem of teacher recruitment and retention has been escalating for some time with concerns fuelled by rising student numbers in secondary, heavy teacher workloads, and funding concerns. The NAO, Education Committee and unions have all highlighted the issues and this week the Public Accounts Committee added its voice. Arguably its sharpest charge is that the government has been asleep at the wheel while 'a crisis has been brewing' which perhaps is why four of its seven recommendations call for responses within a few months. A sense of urgency is evident and the broad thrust is that the Dept should get a plan, one that takes in elements like workloads, CPD and housing costs, and get it quick.

The Social Market Foundation (SMF) report is part of continuing work about another issue that's been around for some time and that is alternative, in this case vocational, routes into HE. To declare an interest, Pearson is one of the sponsors of the report but the question of how alternative qualifications like BTECs are viewed and supported, let alone those who take them, is of wider interest in the context of changing skill needs, social mobility and HE market opportunities. As the report suggests, encouraging universities to publish grade requirements for all types of qualifications would be a good start.

The BBC's survey of what's happening to creative subjects in secondary schools in England covered 40% of secondary schools and reinforced what many have been saying, in some cases anecdotally for some time. The issue is that pressures of funding, league tables and the EBacc are combining to put the squeeze on subjects like music, drama and D/T. The government in the shape of Nick Gibb has maintained a straight bat on this, he answered a question on it in Parliament on Wednesday, but it is a worrying trend for many.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Working class teenagers more likely to apply for uni with vocational qualifications.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Creative subjects being squeezed, schools tell BBC.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘DfE’s sluggish and incoherent approach to teacher shortage crisis slammed by MPs.’ ([Wed](#))
- ‘Religious extremists trying to pervert education.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Maths chief calls for new slimline resit-only GCSE.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [New names on the door](#). The DfE updated its departmental plan to reflect the latest ministerial changes while retaining the focus pretty much as before on its four core objectives of improving quality in early years, closing the attainment gap in schools, developing quality routes post-16, and supporting opportunity for all
- [Stronger links](#). The Prime Minister announced a strengthening of a number of education and training links with China, including the maths teacher exchange programme and joint training and information sharing on early years and vocational education, while on an official visit this week
- [Skills cap](#). The FT reported that for the second month in a row the UK had reached its limit for Tier 2 (skilled) visas for non-EU workers, raising concerns that some business and public services could lose out on recruiting skilled staff
- [Counting the cost](#). The Sutton Trust followed up its earlier work on the costs of internships by examining the costs and approaches in London and Manchester, finding them prohibitive in many cases and calling as a result for internships lasting longer than a month to be waged as proposed in the Private Members’ Bill currently going through Parliament
- [Northern gap](#). The Northern Powerhouse Partnership published a powerful report on the need to improve education and training opportunities in the region through such measures as the creation of a dedicated School Improvement Board, devolved funding, employer mentoring and focus on apprenticeships
- [Cities outlook](#). The Centre for Cities launched its 2018 review of the economic health of some of the UK’s largest urban areas highlighting a continuing North-South divide exacerbated by concerns that cities in the North remain vulnerable to job losses through automation

HE

- [Furniture moving \(1.\)](#) The government confirmed that there had been broad support for QAA as the only applicant for the role of Designated Quality Body (DQB) under the new regulatory regime for HE and that it will make a formal announcement shortly
- [Furniture moving \(2.\)](#) In a separate Paper, the government also confirmed overall support for the Higher Ed Statistics Agency (HESA) as the Designated Data Body under the new regulatory regime and that a formal announcement would follow here too shortly



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- **TEF to do.** Sir Anthony Seldon reviewed the current state of play in the development of Teaching and Subject-level Excellence Frameworks in an article in *Wonkhe* arguing that as the mantle passes to a new Minister, areas like student voice, peer review and learning gain needed strengthening
- **TEF on.** The Office for Students confirmed that it intended to take on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in full form with Professor Chris Husbands continuing as Panel Chair
- **Student Mental Health.** Student Minds, the student mental health charity, reported on its survey of how academics in five universities viewed their role in relation to student mental health, noting a need for better support and recognition as well as clarity on the relationship with student services
- **Market pressures.** Freelance journalist Anna Fazackerley reported in *The Guardian* on the pressures some universities are facing over student recruitment and the potential for a university in the future to go under if numbers drop
- **More stormy seas.** The research agency Shift Learning with support from HSBC and UUK, outlined the range of challenges facing universities including policy upheaval, reputation management, fees and salaries, Brexit and so on, in a commissioned report for the *Guardian*
- **New construction centre.** Northumbria University along with North East IT firm Dynamo took to the House of Lords to announce plans for the creation of a new £40m high-tech Construction Centre to be built in the North East and to use new technology to help create smart cities

FE/Skills

- **Levy concerns.** MPs became quite exercised as questions were raised in Parliament this week about the some of the issues surrounding the apprenticeship levy
- **Inspecting apprenticeship providers.** Ofsted provided a walk-through of a sample inspection of a training provider to show how inspections work with potentially more complex providers
- **Apprenticeship diversity.** The Skills Minister helped launch the '5 Cities Project,' where the National Apprenticeship Service will work with leading employers and leaders in in five major regions to help improve the take up of apprenticeships among disadvantaged groups
- **Failing an Ofsted.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) spelt out what would happen if an apprenticeship training provider was graded as 'inadequate' in its apprenticeship provision
- **Commissioner's report.** The FE Commissioner outlined the work of his team over the last year in helping providers secure improvement, financial stability and increased resilience
- **Vocation, vocation, vocation.** The Social Market Foundation (SMF) reported on the importance of vocational subjects such as BTECs as an alternative progression route into higher ed for many disadvantaged students but where advice, guidance and support is often lacking
- **Mending the Gap.** The Campaign for Learning and NCFE published a new report written by John Widdowson on some of the challenges faced by 16-18 yr olds and calling for funding, support and an extended participation rate to help meet their needs
- **Tightening the belt.** Association of Colleges' President, Alison Birkinshaw blogged about some of the financial challenges facing many colleges as they plan for an increasingly demanding future and the case for working more closely together on sharing expertise



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- **Functional Skills.** The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) announced it was commissioning UCL's IoE to conduct research into the use of phonics in English Functional Skills and its application with different adult learning groups as part of the continuing development of the skills

Schools

- **Teacher recruitment and retention.** The Public Accounts Committee criticized the government for its approach to retaining and developing teachers concluding that there was no overall plan and that it needed to get a grip on what was fast becoming a crisis
- **Reported missing.** The National Children's Bureau called for improved data sharing, intelligence and support as it uncovered that in 2016/17 nearly 50,000 children in England, many vulnerable and from poor backgrounds, were found to be missing education
- **Academy accounts.** The Public Accounts Committee questioned top officials from the DfE and Education and Skills Funding Agency on the state of academy finances, published separately to overall DfE accounts for the first time, and where issues of fees, salaries, regularity and capital costs were all sharply discussed
- **Value for money.** The government launched its costing guide and business support service to help schools ensure best value for money when buying in such services as catering and technical support
- **Pay and rations.** The government provided the Teachers' Pay Review Body with further background details on such matters as teacher supply and affordability to 'assist' it with its deliberations on this year's pay award
- **Facing the music.** The BBC highlighted figures from its recent survey showing that because of cutbacks and pressure on core subjects, many schools were faced with cutting back on creative subjects like music, the arts and design and technology
- **Ethical leadership.** The Chief Inspector outlined the importance of ethical school leadership and respect in a speech to the Church of England Foundation for Education Leadership warning at that same time of the dangers if the promotion of such values are not open to scrutiny
- **Building resilience.** The OECD reported on how some countries had resorted to well-trodden practices such as creating more structured learning environments and avoiding high teacher turnover to help students from more disadvantaged backgrounds build resilience, overcome their difficulties and perform well in PISA tests
- **Digital Skills.** Tata Consultancy reported on its survey of school teachers about education technology finding many positive about the benefits but concerned about variations in equipment and staff skills
- **Parental guidance.** Ofsted published an updated version of its brief guidance for parents on how the inspection process operates for schools
- **Value for money?** Tom Richmond set out some of the thinking behind his recent analysis of the cost-benefits of Free Schools arguing that it's too early to draw definitive conclusions about whether the costs have been worth it

Tweets(s) of the week

- "He's here, he's there, he's every blank bank where" - [@PaulGoodmanCH](#) (on the energetic and effervescent Chair of the Education Committee: Rob Halfon)



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- “Candidate for typically British understatement of the year: “We did expect a bit of a dip” says Minister after 41% fall in apprenticeship starts in levy’s first 6 months” - [@AELPUK](#)
- “@MattHancock: we have hit the target of 95% of people having access to super-fast broadband” - [@Conservatives](#)
- “Tech companies such as Google, Facebook and Airbnb are thought of as soaking up STEM students – but they are increasingly interested in individuals with backgrounds in the creative arts and humanities” - [@timeshighered](#)

Other stories of the week

- Keeping up with the lingo. The Oxford English Dictionary has published its list of new words and phrases for inclusion in the 2018 dictionary. There are over a thousand and they include some that are more familiar than others such as ‘mansplain,’ ‘me time,’ ‘snowflake’ and ‘hangry’ (someone who is irritable as a result of hunger. A link to the full list can be found [here](#)
- Wayward teenagers in fiction. Author and English school teacher Danny Denton provided an interesting list in The Guardian this week of top ten errant teenagers in fiction, ranging from Pinkie in Brighton Rock to Alex in A Clockwork Orange. He felt that many of these connect with teenagers in classrooms today and provide a fascinating stimulus for all sorts of discussion with young people. A link to the list is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “There is more money going into our schools in this country than ever before in the history of the country” – the (new) Education Secretary responds to parliamentary questions on schools funding
- “I will be running a training session for members from all political parties” – the Skills Minister suggests it’s time to help MPs bone up on the levy and apprenticeships
- “I feel so passionately about social mobility and equality of opportunity, to me that was the overriding thing that I wanted to put my time into” – Former Education Secretary Justine Greening on life after the DfE
- “Hi I’m Matt Hancock’ – the Culture Secretary becomes the first MP to have his own app
- “Right idea’ flawed execution” – Sir Anthony Seldon takes stock of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
- “What we have ended up with is a regulator for a nationalized industry” – former V.C. Roger Brown on the Office for Students and the new regulatory regime in the HE sector
- “Get a move on –do something about it, man!” – Former Education Committee Chair Barry Sheerman MP calls on the Universities Minister to get to grip with apprenticeship levy issues
- “Schooling has been increasingly built around the idea that a proportion of children are falling behind” – children’s author and education commentator Michael Rosen opens correspondence with the new Education Secretary
- “We’re bringing up a bunch of children who are behaving like computers” – BBC arts correspondent Will Gompertz on the impact of fileting creative subjects out of the school curriculum
- “It’s incredibly rare to have a day where I haven’t been physically harmed in one way or another” – a teaching assistant describes what it’s like to work in a behavioural centre



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Number(s) of the week

- £675. How much individual students might lose (and should therefore be refunded) according to UCL Student Union, if lecturers carry out their proposed 14 day strike over pensions
- 440+. How many ex-Carillion apprentices have been found employment from out of the 1,200 transferred to new training providers, according to the DfE Permanent Secretary
- 4.9%. The fall in the number of secondary school teachers between 2010 and 2016 according to a new report from the Public Accounts Committee
- £1,019. How much it might cost an internee in London a month in terms of rents, travel and other costs even though most of them, as the Sutton Trust reported, are unpaid
- 39. The number of academy trusts subject to financial improvement notices according to evidence given to the Public Accounts Committee
- 49,187. The number of children reported to be missing education in England in 2016/17 according to the National Children's Bureau
- £11.20. Average weekly pocket money for children, up from £9.70 a year ago and with a pay gap that could cause trouble, according to the latest Childwise report

What to look out for next week

- Children's Mental Health Week
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility (Monday)