



Pearson

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 2 March 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

Baseline assessment, Functional Skills, the Advanced Maths Premium, HE regulation; they may not sound gripping but they are all essential cogs in the education system and all have been in the news this week.

Let's start with the last of these, the launch of a new regulatory framework for higher education in England unveiled this week at the Office for Students (OfS) Conference. There's a lot to take in, nearly 20 documents incorporating a hefty overall manual under the suitably alliterative title of 'Securing student success,' a range of summary responses to the consultation on the said regulatory regime, some government guidance documents on key areas like access and participation, and DAPs and UT (Degree Awarding Powers and University Title) and a new remit letter for the Office for Students when it formally takes over next month.

As usual, experts like [Wonkhe](#), the [Times Higher](#) and the [HE Policy Institute](#) among others have done sterling jobs deciphering it all but perhaps two documents provide helpful starting points. The first is the summary of the [approach to regulation](#) that the OfS will take: 4 objectives; 5 principles; 7 general duties, all in the words of the Chair, Sir Michael Barber, 'creating the conditions for success two or more decades ahead.' There's some helpful stuff in here not least the conditions for registration. And the second is the government's [remit letter](#), bulging with deliverables, 34 in all listed in an Annex and ranging from dealing with grade inflation to Brexit and with high expectations on matters like diversity of provision, access and participation, student choice, and value for money. It'll be a busy year for all concerned.

Functional Skills next, where another [wedge of papers](#) was unleashed. They included the government's response to last autumn's consultation on English and maths subject content, official guidance for developing that content at the required levels, an equality impact assessment report and, wider afield, the results of a research report into how to improve participation and outcomes generally.

The aim is to have the new standards ready for first teaching in 2019. The inclusion of such new hard core content as phonics, spelling lists and some non-calculator activity may help Functional Skills gain the status it's still searching for although according to the consultation responses, not all are convinced.

If Functional Skills feels like a poor relation, maths, or at least advanced maths, where the government confirmed more details this week on its [maths premium for 16-19 year olds](#), certainly doesn't. The aim is laudable: namely using the funding lever to encourage more students to take maths beyond GCSE but many feel the money should have been spread more widely across the parched 16-19 sector.

Finally, baseline assessment, still a sensitive topic and critiqued [here](#) in a paper to MPs this week.



Pearson

Top headlines this week

- 'Former top footballers jailed for £5m fraud targeting FE colleges.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Functional skills maths and English content guidance published.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Schools to get up £2,400 for each extra A' level maths student.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Five things to know on school offer day.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Learners let down by Learndirect, say MPs.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Advanced Maths Premium](#). The government confirmed the funding rates and arrangements by which schools and colleges will be able to earn additional funding when 16-19 students take designated advanced maths or stats courses beyond GCSE from 2018/19
- [Too big to fail](#). The Public Accounts Committee published the results of its inquiry into issues surrounding Learndirect Ltd, arguing in the context of Carillion, that the government and inspection agencies need to learn lessons, clarify risk factors and not assume that any one company is too big to fail
- [Safety Net](#). The Children's Society and Young Minds charity reported on its MP - led inquiry into young people and cyberbullying, highlighting the harmful effect this can have on many young people and calling on social media companies to respond quicker when concerns are raised
- [Tech She Can Charter](#). The consultancy company PwC launched its new cross-industry initiative intended to help more women take up careers in technology

HE

- [Tough on standards, tough on accountability](#). HE Minister Sam Gyimah helped launched the new regulatory framework for higher education in England in a speech at the Office for Students Conference where he prioritized the significance of the latest reforms and of the overall student experience
- [Strategic priorities](#). The government listed its priorities for the incoming Office for Students (OfS) for the coming year with an emphasis on student quality and choice, access and participation, value for money, research and industrial strategy
- [Regulatory handbook](#). The Office for Students (OfS) launched its comprehensive new regulatory framework for higher education in England with major chapters on managing risk, securing regulation, overseeing validation and dealing with registration
- [Commuter students](#). The Sutton Trust reported on the issue of students who live at home and go to a local university, something that the government believes could help reduce costs but which this report suggests could limit opportunity and social mobility in many cases
- [More reflections on the funding review](#). Dr Matt Dickson at Bath University's Institute for Policy Research examined a number of different funding alternatives, from scrapping fees altogether to variable fees, in the light of the recent review announcement, and concluded that what was needed was tweaks rather than a major overhaul



Pearson

- **How do others do it?** The Assurance Agency (QAA) published a report on how four other UK regulators (the Care Quality Commission, Financial Conduct Authority, Food Standards Agency and HMRC) use data as part of their regulatory systems, drawing out interesting questions about the use of data in regulating HE
- **More rankings.** UK universities performed highly with four in the top ten of the latest QS subject rankings which identify which are the best universities around the world in each of nearly 50 subjects
- **Working to the Code.** The Commissioner for Public Appointments reported on the investigation into the earlier controversial Board appointment to the Office of Students (OfS) expressing concern that due diligence had not been followed
- **Global edtech.** Wonkhe hosted an interesting comment piece by Sally Jeffery of PwC looking at some of the latest edtech trends in HE round the world including how technology is opening up access to learning and the creation of interactive textbooks such as those being developed by Pearson and others
- **Further talks.** Both sides in the universities pensions dispute which has affected 61 universities so far have agreed to further talks mediated by ACAS as a further strike looms for next week

FE/Skills

- **In response.** The DfE issued its overall response to last autumn's consultation on Functional Skill content in English and maths acknowledging concerns about spelling lists, calculators and levels but not giving much ground
- **Functional skills English.** The DfE indicated some minor modifications as it confirmed the subject content to be used in developing Functional Skills English following recent consultation
- **Functional skills maths.** The DfE separately published the subject content to be used in developing Functional Skill maths, confirming non - calculator use in some areas
- **Bit of a nudge.** The DfE published the final results of its lengthy commissioned research into how best to improve English and maths performance, finding that 'simple' behavioural interventions such as sending weekly text messages particularly to FE learners and families, were often the most effective
- **End point assessments.** Ofqual launched a brief consultation on the conditions and requirements that it will apply if called on to assure apprenticeship end point assessments
- **Slide show.** Ofqual published slides on regulating vocational qualifications, apprenticeship end-point assessments and other issues presented at its conference this week for regulated awarding organisations
- **Requiring improvement.** Ofsted responded to its earlier consultation on inspection arrangements for providers deemed 'requiring improvement' by confirming that it will carry out a single monitoring visit on providers designated as such since 10 November 2017
- **Levy changes.** The Local Government Association (LGA) outlined five changes to the apprenticeship levy system including local area pooling of contributions and further flexibilities to the time limit on levy spend as it raised its own concerns about a drop in apprenticeship starts



Pearson

Schools

- **More than a Score.** The More Than a Score coalition of educationalists and parents presented a critique of the government's plans for baseline assessment, arguing that it's not valid, not trustworthy and can be damaging for children, and calling instead for more formative assessment and self-evaluation
- **GCSE grades.** The government published factsheets for parents, employers and providers on the 'new' grading scale at GCSE pointing to which subjects fall under scope this year
- **Unregistered schools.** The BBC reported on what appears to be a growing concern as Ofsted called stronger powers to be able to go in and investigate where necessary
- **Access to Special Schools.** The Education Policy Institute reported on some of the challenges faced by those needing access to special schools suggesting that on average such pupils are having to travel three times further than pupils from mainstream schools and that effectively government has allowed the needs of these pupils to slip while it focuses on providing for its preferred models of school
- **And another thing.** The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) presented supplementary evidence to the body looking at teachers' pay, highlighting its opposition to differentiated pay awards and arguing that the initial money on the table is insufficient and that the teacher recruitment and retention crisis are greater than assumed
- **2030 Skills.** The Speakers for Schools charity launched its 2018 campaign focused on what skills young people will need for work in 2030, with a team of leading figures standing ready to go into state schools and talk to young people and/or offer placement visits
- **In Your Face.** The 'Be Real' campaign headed by the YMCA and Dove released findings from their recent survey of young people's experiences of 'appearance-based bullying' showing that it often starts by the age of ten and over half of young people had suffered from this form of bullying
- **Easing the load.** A Grammar School in Yorkshire reported on how it had responded to the Workload Challenge by among other things: changing its marking policy, planning collectively and only collecting necessary data
- **Bite Size.** Guy's and St Thomas' Charity along with the Behavioural Insights Team reported on how schools along with others in a community (in this case in London) can help tackle the challenge of inner-city obesity among children, by for example helping to see schools as places of exercise

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Study online but keep an eye out for the postman:@CUBoulder to mail out circuit boards and other equipment to students on first fully online electrical engineering master's degree" - @timeshighered
- "We are very grateful that neither of our sons' schools assigns homework. It leaves our evenings free to do what we want – watch Cosmo, read together, play outside, go on bike rides etc" - @davidwees
- "Glad to see my daughter's school has replaced dressing up for world book day with reading books and swap books you have read for others they haven't – it's almost as if they think reading is important" - @Trivium21c
- "By 2030 will universities walk fast alone or walk far and together?" - @UCL_Global
- "According to a recent survey three-quarters of UK children spend less time outside than prison inmates – with the consequence that families are losing touch with nature. This is a shocking statistic that we really need to change" - @MightyMamasUK

Policy Eye

Week ending Friday 2 March 2018



Pearson

- “A quarter of workers have a work-related nightmare at least once a week” - [@Independent](#)

Other stories of the week

- When will the world reach ‘peak child?’ The short answer is probably around the year 2057, after that numbers will broadly plateau. That at least is the view of the Oxford University based ‘Our World in Data’ team which, as the name on the tin suggests, publishes data that helps inform significant global trends. Interestingly as a recent blog from the team indicates, the key factor in determining the number of children globally appears to be the provision of quality education, as this in turn impacts on the core drivers of population growth such as fertility and mortality. A link to this particular report with its trends and data can be found [here](#).
- Becoming part of the furniture. A recent study has revealed a list of signs that indicate you’ve been in your current job too long and have started to become part of the furniture. Apparently it takes about four and a half years to reach such a position and the signs that point to it include things like spotting when someone has fiddled with your chair settings (No 9) and maintaining a fully stacked snack drawer (No 37.) A link to the full list of 40 signs is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “We will also restore free ESOL courses” – Jeremy Corbyn includes skills training among his ambitions for ‘a Brexit that works for all’
- “I have made some suggestions about how due diligence might be improved” – the Commissioner for Public Appointments leaves the Office for Students with some homework
- “This is exactly the type of education we believe higher education should be offering” – the Chair of the Education Committee takes his members to meet degree apprenticeships at Warwick University’s Manufacturing Centre
- “Golden Ages don’t have to be in the past” – Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students (OfS) maintains the mantra as the OfS takes shape
- “It is becoming increasingly apparent that there is something amiss in the way our universities are run” – the Observer editorial goes on to outline what it calls ‘a system in need of reform’
- “The fact that the government is today extolling the virtues of the revised functional skills qualifications surely makes it even more obvious that these are a perfectly valid alternative for young people and they should be allowed to take them instead of GCSEs” – ASCL’s Geoff Barton asks the question
- “People often talk about exam boards as if they’re great big plutocratic organisations. They’re not actually” – the departing head of Cambridge Assessment, Simon Lebus, on the view from inside an exam board
- “In adverse weather conditions, school leaders and teachers staff should travel to work if safe to do so, safety concerns are the most important as it is a safety issue first and foremost” – the National Association of Head Teachers puts safety first in its advice on coping with bad weather
- ‘John Steinbeck’s East of Eden’ – Nick Gibb reveals his favourite book on World Book Day (Damian Hinds went for a book read with his children: Julia Donaldson’s ‘What the Ladybird Heard’)



Pearson

Number(s) of the week

- 39%. How many CEOs see cyber-attacks as the biggest threat to their UK business, according to a new survey by PwC
- 44.9%. The number of students from lower social class groups who stay at home and go to the local university compared to the 13.1% of more advantaged students who tend to leave home for uni, according to the latest report from the Sutton Trust
- 2%. The pay rise for many Sixth Form College teachers backdated to last September, according to latest media reports
- 333. The number of responses to the recent consultation on the subject content for English and maths functional skills, according to the DfE
- £95m. The underspend on initial teacher training for 2017/18, according to the TES
- 11.1%. The 16-24 NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate for the final quarter of last year, slightly down according to the latest stats from the DfE
- 60%. How many parents want pollution exclusion zones around schools with vehicles diverted away at the start and end of the school day, according to a survey by the environmental group ClientEarth
- 12. The age at which 61% of young people had their first social media account, according to a new report by the Children's Society and Young Minds

What to look out for next week

- National Apprenticeship Week (All Week)
- AoC Annual HE Conference (Tuesday)
- Jisc's Digifest Event (Tuesday, Wednesday)
- ASCL Annual Conference (Friday, Saturday)