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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 6 December 2019



(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.

Education has continued to feature in these final days of the 2019 election campaign.

It, or specifically legislation on per pupil funding, features in the Conservatives' ['battle plan'](#) for any first 100 days in office released this week while Labour has been pressing home its [plans for education](#), plans that include more teachers, extra funding and capped class sizes. In addition, the Education Policy Institute, has [published](#) a comprehensive assessment of the parties' education plans, pointing among other things to concerns about where the extra money might come from, how difficult it might be to meet social mobility aspirations, and some disappointment about visions for post-18.

More immediately there've been some important education developments to catch up on this week. These include the latest global [PISA assessment results](#), an important [report](#) from the Sutton Trust and FFT Education Datalab on the impact of the GCSE reforms on the attainment gap, and calls from both the [CBI](#) and a [former HE Minister](#) for reforms to R/D funding. And, as staff parties swing into action, [the Economist](#) has reported that most employees would rather have a Christmas bonus than a Christmas bash.

Let's start with the release of the latest PISA test results from the OECD. Taken last year by a sample of 15 year olds across 79 countries, just over 5,000 from 170 schools in the case of the UK, and covering maths, science and reading, this programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) offers, in the words of education director Andreas Schleicher: 'the world's premier yardstick for comparing quality, equity, and efficiency in learning outcomes across countries and an influential force for education reform.'

So how have we done and what have we learnt? As the [headline](#) from the Independent put it: 'UK climbs education rankings but teenagers unhappier than elsewhere.' We've certainly moved up the international league chart compared to the last two tests in 2015 and 2012, particularly in maths, yet some of the progress within the UK is marginal, science scores have dropped, many of the commentaries refer to UK progress as 'modest' and, as the headline indicated, young people are less satisfied with their lives than young people across other OECD countries. It is therefore a hopeful but rather mixed bag for the UK and it's worth looking at some of the coverage from the [TES](#), [FFT Education Datalab](#) and [NFER](#) to name a few, for a more nuanced picture.

Finally, a brief shout-out for that report on the impact of the GCSE reforms on the attainment gap. It's a carefully argued report with an important message about the effect of the reforms on disadvantaged pupils. As such it further underlines a continuing fault line in the English education system, election or no.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Seven charts on the £73,000 cost of educating a child.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Pisa tests: UK rising in international school rankings.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'The Netflixisation of academia: is this the end for university lectures?' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'New GCSEs widen gap between rich and poor.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Pisa chief: mistrust of teachers holds England back.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Sizing up education plans](#). The Education Policy Institute in a report sponsored by Nuffield, offered a comprehensive analysis of what the party manifestos have had to say about education, concluding that pledges on social mobility are unlikely to be fulfilled, funding sources remain uncertain and post-18 plans are 'disappointing.'
- [Checking the small print](#). The UK Statistics Authority reported that it still had some concerns about the ways in which both major parties were talking about education funding, in particular Conservative claims about spending and Labour claims about the extent of cuts
- [What about local councils?](#) The Institute for Fiscal Studies examined what the party manifestos had to say about local council funding in the future, suggesting that only Labour and the Lib-Dems had allocated enough money to meet future demands and even then it still left gaps in areas like social care
- [Automation and voting behaviour](#). The Institute for the Future of Work examined whether there was a relationship between voting behavior and the risk of losing a job through automation concluding that there was 'a strong correlation' and calling for active labour market policies and investment to support workers in transition
- [Atlas of Inequality](#). Sheffield University, with funding from the Nuffield Foundation, published a new 'Atlas of Inequality' for England covering 149 TTWAs (travel to work areas,) noting the challenges involved in getting an accurate picture and the need for policy makers to recognize among other things that not all poor people live in the poorest places

HE

- [Building R/D](#). Former Higher Education Minister David Willetts outlined a 12 point plan to boost research and development in Britain and in particular future 'critical technologies,' calling for universities to be fully funded for research, for more private initiatives and for a bolder approach to research development generally
- [Stepping up R/D](#). The CBI issued a new report on R/D calling for the next government to set out a roadmap within its first year of office and to kickstart activity through the creation of new 'Catapult Quarters' to incentivize local activity especially in more disadvantaged areas
- [Developing the Civic model](#). The UPP Foundation and Carnegie UK Trust invited bids from organisations interested in hosting a Civic University Network, one that that would share best practice and help nurture the growing civic university concept



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- **Data security.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) in a report sponsored by Tribal published its latest YouthSight report, in this case looking at student views on data security and indicating that under half of students surveyed felt confident that their institution would keep their personal data secure
- **Freedom of Expression.** The Policy Institute at King's College published the results of a new survey on freedom of expression indicating that most students saw it as an issue for wider society than for their own institution
- **Education mismatch.** Researchers at UCL's Institute of Education examined the state of application mismatch in UKHE, looking at which courses students attended given their academic attainment and finding that often students from lower social backgrounds tended to attend lower quality courses, posing obvious problems for subsequent social mobility
- **Disabled students.** The HE Commission launched a call for evidence, to close at the end of January 2020, to support its inquiry into the experience of disabled students in higher education
- **Battle of ideas.** The Times Higher reflected on what the two main party manifestos had to say on higher education concluding that they revealed two contrary approaches to higher ed

FE/Skills

- **Funding promises.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) reported on manifesto funding pledges on FE and adult learning, concluding that Conservative proposals remain 'relatively modest' and while Labour and the Lib-Dems have promised greater increases, these may be subject to risks if demand changes
- **Capital funding.** The Collab Group of Colleges issued a new manifesto statement calling on the next government to create a new ring fenced capital investment fund to the tune of at least £2bn
- **UTCs.** FE Week reported that three new applications for University Technical Colleges (UTCs,) the first for a number of years, had been lodged, each looking to recruit 11 rather than 14 year old students

Schools

- **PISA 2018.** The OECD published the latest set of PISA test results taken by a sample of 15 year olds across 79 countries, centred on reading literacy, maths and science and showing some progress by the UK particularly in maths but with concerns about the levels of young people's life satisfaction
- **Mind the Gap.** The Sutton Trust in conjunction with FFT Education Datalab published a new report looking into the impact on disadvantaged pupils of the reformed GCSEs, suggesting that the reforms increased the test score gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, albeit by a small amount but particularly for those with middle levels of prior attainment
- **Cutting it.** The School Cuts website was relaunched to show what party spending plans in manifestos would mean for schools in England with an interactive map revealing the impact of cuts so far and how far any spending plans would help ameliorate things
- **Putting Evidence to work.** The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) updated its school's guide to implementing school improvement practices using its 4-stage Explore, Prepare, Deliver, Sustain model
- **A book for Christmas.** The National Literacy Trust reported on the number of children who don't own a book of their own, urging people to give the 'Gift of Reading' for Christmas and suggesting a list of books selected by well-known authors that children might like



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Tweets(s) of the week.

- “Mums and dads bigger problem than essay mills” - [@timeshighered](#)
- “All these rows in HE, it’s a wonder anyone learns ‘owt’” - [@tstarkey1212](#)
- “I wonder if the inference that teaching adults is a little bit like Saturday night up the Playboy Mansion derives from misty, water-coloured memories of people’s own post-school education in different times” - [@tesfeneews](#)
- “Just been to my 4-yr old’s nativity play and I can confirm that the birth of Christ was faithfully facilitated by the actions of at least one slightly shy donkey. As it is written let it be done. Priceless” - [@tombennett71](#)
- “Student 24 accuses Mr Clever (of Mr Men books) of ‘mansplaining’ to Miss Curious” - [@MarcherLord1](#)
- “A survey found that 71% of British employees would rather have a small cash bonus than a Christmas knees-up” – [@TheEconomist](#)

Other stories of the week

- The rise of EduTube. The Guardian had an interesting article this week about the rise of EduTube, where students record their learning experiences on video and share them on social media. Not new perhaps but now quite a feature of university life, a sort of visual diary of the ups and downs of undergraduate life. According to the article, viewing of such content has grown by 20% in the last year alone and yet many universities have yet to grasp its potential as a marketing tool. The article can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “I think we can talk about signals of progress”- OECD education director Andreas Schleicher reflects on the UK’s performance in the latest PISA tests
- “The Authority is encouraged by the DfE’s announcement that it will be publishing new summary statistics on school funding in January 2020” – the UK Statistics Authority reports on how school funding is being presented in party manifestos
- “Sometimes we get it wrong but if we all avoid backing any actual technology then we get nowhere” – Lord Willetts outlines a 12 point plan to boost UK R/D
- “We’re calling for an overhaul of GCSEs which improves the prospects of the forgotten third of students who currently fall short of achieving at least a Grade 4 ‘standard pass’ in GCSE English and maths” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton responds to the Sutton Trust report on the impact of the GCSE reforms
- “Use online meal planners and try cooking in batches or with friends to save time and money” – the Guardian helpline offers advice for students on how to avoid financial stress at university
- “This is a victory for the barbarians” – John Richards, the 96 year old founder of the Apostrophe Society announces that the Society was winding down in the face of constant apostrophe abuse or perhaps abuse’s



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Number(s) of the week

- 14th, 14th and 18th. UK rankings for reading, science, and maths respectively according to the latest PISA test results
- 53%. How many 15 year olds are likely to say they are satisfied with their life compared to 67% across other OECD countries, according to the latest PISA test results
- £21.4bn. UK revenue from education related exports and transnational education activity for 2017, up 7.2% on the year before, according to the latest data from the DfE
- 45%. How many students surveyed are confident that their institution will keep their personal data secure and private, according to a new survey published by the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- £75,000. How much is being offered for an organisation to set up a new Civic University Network, according to an announcement from the UPP Foundation and Carnegie UK Trust
- £863,768. How much some colleges have made over the last year from charging staff for car parking, according to figures uncovered by the TES
- 5%. The increase in entries for November exam GCSE English and maths resits, according to provisional data from Ofqual
- 140. How many dedicated audit apprentices KPMG is looking to recruit, according to the company's head of audit
- 1.63. How many times it's more likely that non-disadvantaged pupils will achieve a grade 5 or above in the 'new' GCSEs compared to 1.42 times under the old system, according to a new report from the Sutton Trust
- 383,775. How many children in the UK don't have a book of their own, according to a new survey from the Children's Literacy Trust

What to look out for next week

- Polling Day (Thursday)