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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 10 January 2020



(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.

Back to work and for education, plenty to catch up on let alone look out for in the coming weeks.

Let's start with what's been happening in the first week or so of 2020. Along with the traditional New Year rallying [call](#) from the Prime Minister ("I want to make this country the best place on earth when it comes to quality education,") [passion](#) from the Education Secretary ("I care passionately about what the DfE does,") Budget date [announcement](#) from the Chancellor (March 11,) and eclectic [blog](#) on machinery of government changes from the PM's chief adviser, ("we want to hire an unusual set of people with different skills and backgrounds,") the new year has kicked off with a stream of reports and announcements.

The announcements have included [consultation](#) on inspecting exempt schools and colleges, [invites](#) for the next wave of T level provision, a [foray](#) into the use of AI in exam marking, the [promise](#) of £85m for music and creative arts, and two interesting appointments: Hillary Clinton as the new Chancellor of [Queen's University, Belfast](#), and Emma Hardy MP as the new [Shadow Minister for F and HE](#).

As for reports, there's been plenty including: one from [Ofsted](#) on the challenges facing 'stuck' schools, a new report from the [EDSK think tank](#) on the apprenticeship levy, an interesting examination on the [HEPI website](#) of languages provision, a set of future-proof principles from [the AELP](#) on Skills Accounts and two reports from the [Education Policy Institute](#), one on wellbeing in the workforce and the other on young people's access to mental health services. As ever, a varied but important range of issues.

Ofsted's report is particularly pertinent and adds further credence to its efforts to be seen as 'a force for improvement.' There are some 415 'stuck' schools, split pretty evenly between primary and secondary and so-called because they've failed to improve over the last 13 years of inspections. Some schools with the right support, policies and focus, have managed to pick up and Ofsted is calling for government funds so that it can do more to help.

And so on to some traditional new year future gazing given added spice with the confluence of a new government at the start of a new decade. On the economy, the FT reported that its annual [survey](#) of economists saw over 30% predicting that UK productivity will remain low and GDP growth static in 2020. Scientists, in another [survey](#), are looking to a decade of major breakthroughs notably in AI, space and medicine while anyone looking for a panoramic perspective on the year ahead could do worse than look at the ten crucial questions from the [New Statesman](#) on the world for 2020. They include whether the wave of global protests will continue and whether Trump will be re-elected. Quite a year beckons.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Teachers happier despite falling job satisfaction.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Third of Cambridge University staff have experienced bullying.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Ofsted report says 200,000 pupils stuck in low achieving schools.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Could exams be marked by AI? Ofqual launches 'exciting' competition.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Outstanding schools to face inspections again.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **'A fantastic year.'** The Prime Minister talked up the year ahead in a videoed New Year message, highlighting education reform as one of his listed priorities for the year ahead
- **Budget build-up.** The Chancellor confirmed that the Budget would take place on March 11 and would provide for 'a decade of renewal,' with regional levelling up, costed big infrastructure projects, social care and vocational education all likely to be major priorities
- **Pleased to be here.** The Education Secretary Gavin Williamson explained that he was pleased to be back in the job as he set out some of his thoughts on the year ahead in his new year message for teachers
- **Economic runes.** The FT published its annual new year survey of how leading economists saw the year ahead for the UK, with few predicting much in the way of growth, pointing instead to business investment remaining weak, productivity flatlining and consumer spending staying steady
- **Saturday jobs and more.** The Resolution Foundation examined the jobs market particularly for young people drawing out three trends: the collapse of the teenage Saturday job; a fall in earning while learning; and a longer transition into employment from education, calling for more flexible study and work policies accordingly
- **The changing job market.** The RSA reported on which jobs had been the fastest growing and which had been the fastest disappearing over the last decade with programmers and software developers along with teachers, care workers and nurses among the fastest growing and traditional high street jobs such as sales assistants and cashiers among the fastest disappearing
- **Educators' wellbeing.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) reported on teacher wellbeing suggesting that while it had improved in recent years for some, job satisfaction had fallen with FE teachers and senior leaders in particular reporting some of the highest levels of anxiety

HE

- **Loan system.** The Education Secretary confirmed that student loan accounts would go online during the year enabling students to have better visibility over their accounts as part of a wider system reform
- **Setting expectations.** The Office for Students (OfS) launched consultation on a new proposals for dealing with cases of harassment and sexual misconduct in HE, proposing among other things clearer information and more effective processes with potential fines for breaches



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- **Mind your language.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report on language courses, written by a third-year Classics undergraduate at Oxford and pointing to a number of issues about the state of languages provision, calling among other things for languages in some form to be compulsory at KS4
- **Heroic Failures?** Wonkhe's David Kernohan reflected on some of the worst policy decisions for HE over the last decade, listing nine in all including the Browne Review, MOOCs and a belief in variable fees

FE/Skills

- **T level providers.** The government invited bids from providers ready to take on and teach the 3rd wave of T levels due from September 2022
- **Runaway Training.** Tom Richmond issued a new report on apprenticeships arguing that a failure to define just what an apprenticeship was and how the levy should operate, had meant that a lot of levy funding had been used for 'inappropriate' training and calling as a result for clearer directions on both
- **Making Skills Accounts work.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) reflected on the past history of skills accounts and set out a range of operating principles for any future model given current political interest
- **Reserving funds.** The government set out procedures for non-levy paying employers to be able to access levy funds under a system of applying for funding to be reserved, initially for up to three starts while the system rolls out
- **New Shadow Minister.** FE Week and others profiled Emma Hardy MP, the new Shadow Minister for F/HE following on from Gordon Marsden

Schools

- **Inspections for all.** The government launched consultation on ending the inspection exemption currently in place for outstanding schools and colleges with a new universal system due to be in place from this September
- **Coming unstuck.** Ofsted reported on the challenges facing schools 'stuck' on poor performance and struggling to improve, highlighting how some schools had managed to pick up and calling on the government to help fund it to do more to help in this area
- **Exam marking by AI.** Ofqual launched a project to test out how AI might be best used in exam marking, starting with a competition looking at how far AI can support human marking when it comes to a GCSE English language essay
- **Support hubs.** The government finally confirmed the six leading schools that will act as regional hubs offering training and support for schools in need of help as part of its latest school improvement scheme
- **Arts premium.** The government announced a new multi-million pound package to support creative arts in schools as part of its manifesto commitment to develop a pupil Arts Premium
- **Teacher vacancies.** The government published a series of leaflets and posters intended to promote its new free Teaching Vacancies service
- **Teacher R and R.** The Lib-Dems warned that the costs of visa fees plus the proposed immigration health surcharge could end up deterring teachers from the EU coming to work here after Brexit just at a time when their numbers were dropping and recruitment concerns rising



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- **Mental health issues.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) published its Annual Report on access to support services for young people suffering from mental health issues noting a wide regional variation in approaches and waiting times still too high in many cases
- **Dealing with challenging behavior.** The Centre for Mental Health raised concerns about restrictive interventions such as 'isolation booths' being used in some schools to help manage challenging behavior, calling for more evidence to help develop appropriate solutions
- **Preparing for the future.** Jane Prescott, the incoming President of the Girls' Schools Association (GSA) for 2020 reported on the recent poll from the GSA on how best to prepare young people for the future, with more languages, project work, cultural dialogue and global perspectives all proposed
- **Two years in.** Russell Hobby reflected on his first two years at the helm of Teach First highlighting the organization's mantra of teachers + leaders + networks = success for schools

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "The night before a new #School Term (which I was looking forward to,) couldn't fall asleep until 1.00 am. Made it through Monday on 4 hrs sleep and had an early night. ..about 8.00 pm" - [@JoMarie357](#)
- "Be brave, be nice and reject pretty much any extra work that doesn't improve the lot of your students. I can think of many, many worse ways to kick off a new decade than that" - [@Ed_Dorrell](#)
- "Online learning is potentially a solution to the environmental impact of a growing HE sector...it has been estimated that online learning consumes 90% less energy and produces 85% fewer carbon dioxide emissions than campus-based learning" - [@neilmosley5](#)
- "Schools move class trips closer to home as eco-conscious pupils try to lower their carbon footprint, leading headteacher says" - [@Schools Improve](#)
- "I put in a stationery request for whiteboard pens. They have issued me yellow, brown and green. What sin have I committed to deserve this punishment?" - [@blacklaceknits](#)
- "This morning I've looked after one friend's kid, made two breakfasts, one packed lunch, helped one kid with homework, walked two kids forty minutes to school, walked a half hour back, and apparently according to our definitions am only now about to start work" - [@holliepoetry](#)
- "The singular pronoun 'they' has been named word of the decade by US linguists" - [@SkyNews](#)

Other stories of the week

- **Jobs of the future.** A lot of research has been done on how the job market might change in the future in the light of automation and other factors. The start of a new year let alone a new decade has brought a further burst of conjecture with, as referred to above, the RSA looking at not just job changes over the last decade but possible labour market scenarios over the next decade. They suggest four possible future scenarios: a Big Tech Economy where coders and 'agile' project managers would be in demand; a Big Precision Economy where analysts and behavioural scientists would be in demand; an Exodus Economy where designers and community energy managers would be in demand; and an Empathy Economy where detox consultants and yes, instore influencers would be in demand. A link to the article is [here](#)



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Quote(s) of the week

- “It’s a fantastically exciting agenda. Let’s get to work” –The Prime Minister rounds off his New Year message in typically rousing fashion
- “With this Budget we will unleash Britain’s potential” – the Chancellor starts the build-up to this year’s Budget
- “I’d just like to say that it is an incredible privilege to be back as your champion in government ” – Education Secretary Gavin Williamson appears happy to pick up the cudgels in his new year message
- “But the point of this government is to do things differently and better and this always looks messy” – Dominic Cummings ruminates about changing the way the government operates
- “It’s a place I have a great fondness for” – Hillary Clinton on being appointed Chancellor of Queen’s University Belfast
- “The decision to limit language learning in schools by making GCSE languages voluntary is probably the single most damaging education policy implemented in England so far this century” – HEPI director Nick Hillman introduces a new HEPI report on Languages
- “FE has to have its status raised and valued way more than it has in the past but not at the expense of HE “ – the new Shadow Minister for F/HE sets out her stall
- “Overall, schools told us that they received too much advice and that this advice was ‘thrown’ at them without enough support” – Ofsted reports on the challenges facing schools struggling to improve

Number(s) of the week

- 25%. How many people are actively looking for a new job as they return to work this week, according to a survey from Investors in People
- x 117. How many times more some top FTSE chief executives were paid than the average UK worker in 2018, according to new data from the High Pay Centre and CIPD
- 2.7. How many hours a week on average commuters lose to travel delays and disruptions, according to a survey from the CBI and KPMG
- £7,990pa. How much on average students are paying to live in private purpose-built student accommodation, according to a new survey from the agents Knight Frank
- £165m. How much the government is providing for its Troubled Families project to enable it to continue for a further year according to an announcement from the Communities Secretary
- £85m. How much the government is putting into its school Arts Premium for 2020/21, according to an announcement from the DfE
- 2. How many months on average young people with mental health issues have to wait for treatment, according to a new report from the Education Policy Institute

What to look out for next week

- Closing date for further round of UCAS applications (Tuesday)
- AoC Winter Funding Conference (Tuesday)

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And the week after:

- Launch of latest Ofsted Annual Report (Tuesday Jan 21)