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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 12 February 2016



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly 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

MPs headed off early this week for the half term break with some big education reports ringing in their ears.

First the recruitment and quality of teachers, an issue that's been running for some time with arguments about whether there is a recruitment and retention crisis or not, and which was the subject of a new report from the National Audit Office (NAO) this week. NAO reports often offer valuable analysis of a current issue and this was no different with concerns raised about how far the current training model was meeting recruitment and quality needs. Para 23 in the summary pretty much captures the answer: missed recruitment targets, little understanding of local trends, few real quality impact measures. The Dept will, and has, claimed it's doing what it can and is launching the National Teaching Force this autumn but for secondary schools in particular where the demands of the EBacc loom, the concerns are real. (Future NAO reports by the way will cover Apprenticeships and LEPs, both due in the next couple of months.)

Second, another one of those hefty reports from the OECD, this time on what it called 'low-performers,' namely 15 year old kids struggling in particular with the core subjects. Evidence for the report comes from the PISA data factory and highlights just how real an issue this is: *"about 13m 15 yr olds in 64 countries that participated in PISA 2012 were low performers in at least one core subject."* The UK comes out as low-average on this data with maths still a worry but the \$64,000 dollar question is what to do about. The report points to some countries that have managed to improve but there's no magic bullet it seems apart from making it a priority particularly at the early years and primary stages of learning.

Third, we're almost exactly a month away from the next Budget and the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) has started its customary excellent build-up with an initial overview report. This year's Budget of course takes place against a difficult economic climate, when hasn't it perhaps, but the IFS make the point that the Chancellor is largely boxed in in terms of what he can do. It all makes fairly grim reading for public services such as education with low levels of pay and spending predicted.

Top headlines this week

- 'Independent schools must embrace vocational courses, says headmaster.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Social media age limits ignored by most youngsters.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Teacher shortages in England, spending watchdog confirms.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Tories change course in search for Ofsted chief.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Tests for four year olds unreliable and disruptive.' ([Friday](#))

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People/organisations in the news this week

- The Duchess of Cambridge who lent her support to Children's [Mental Health Week](#) through a video recorded in a primary school in London
- The HE Minister who issued new [guidance](#) to encourage more universities work with key target groups, schools and the Social Mobility Taskforce to help widen access
- The government who have sharpened up their [strategy](#) for ensuring student loans are paid back
- The Education Secretary who has rejected calls for [PSHE](#) to be made a statutory subject but announced that a new action plan and recommendations for improvement will follow shortly
- [The Education and Adoption Bill](#) which has gone back to the Commons for final tweaking as it nears completion
- The Education and Skills sub-committee who have just announced that they will hold an [inquiry](#) into apprenticeships pretty much covering all bases including the targets, the levy, quality and progression
- The Institute of Fiscal Studies who published its [analysis](#) of options facing the Chancellor as he prepares for his March Budget suggesting he faces some tough decisions if he is to meet his target of running a surplus by 2019/20
- Sir David Bell who will chair the new [working group](#) set up by Universities UK to look at the viability and functions of the quango land around the HE sector
- Reading University who is proposing to accept students who just miss a grade as part of a new, more [flexible admissions](#) approach
- The University and College Union (UCU) who published its latest [report](#) on the pay and perks of senior university managers indicating that the average annual salary of a university VC was now seven times higher than that of their staff
- UCU who have also published an [online tool](#) to help lecturers in HE and FE see if they're being paid a fair rate compared to others in the same and similar institutions
- The Skills Funding Agency who published the outcomes of its [review](#) of publicly funded digital skills qualifications listing 6 recommendations covering clarity of language, standards and priorities
- The Construction Industry Board (CITB) who have approved a new [business plan](#) designed to focus on training and skills and ensure maximum value from the apprenticeship levy
- Former Schools Minister David Laws who will chair a [new scheme](#), modelled on Teach First, and intended to attract more graduates into helping transform prison education and learning
- The National Audit Office (NAO) who published a [report](#) on training new teachers concluding that the current arrangements are not value for money and that with signs of teacher shortage growing, the government needs to look at ways of improving things
- Lib-Democrat MP John Pugh who used the 10-minute rule in Parliament to propose a [Bill](#) that would give schools the right to challenge the timings and outcomes of Ofsted inspections
- Ofsted, who as the Chief Inspector promised last year, has started formally recognizing exceptional school leaders in a [letter](#) cc'd to the Secretary of State



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- Ofsted who published a follow-up report on [alternative or out of school provision](#) and found that while schools were generally taking this seriously a lot more needs doing to guarantee good provision
- The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Royal Society who are commissioning a joint review, due to report later this year, on how best to raise [science performance](#), particularly among disadvantaged pupils, in primary and secondary schools
- The OECD who published a [report](#) on low-performers particular in maths where one-fifth of 15 yr olds in the UK and ¼ in the OECD overall are below the acceptable L2 baseline
- The Standards and Testing agency who have sent out more [exemplification material](#) for teacher assessments, this time for KS1 and 2 English writing but creating concerns about a lot more box ticking
- “*I Need a Wee!*” one of the titles included in The Guardian’s listing for this year’s Lollies (Laugh Out Loud) award as the [funniest children’s books](#) where voting closes this summer

Tweet(s) of the week

- “*Students who have repeated a grade are 7x more likely to be low performers at 15.*” @OECDeduSkills
- “*Sorry I can’t hand in my assignment I’ve lost my memory stick.*” @ WCGamesArt
- “*I tried my hand at teaching and found it’s both a physical and mental workout.*” @ed_ontap
- “*It’s better to be inspection-ready than to prepare for inspection.*” @ Ofstednews
- “*Children need to be bored sometimes-boredom is their imagination calling them to turn inside.*” @DTWillingham

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- “*Headwinds and tailwinds.*” What the Chancellor is battling with as he draws up his forthcoming Budget according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies

Quote(s) of the week

- “*I did go there to create a competent regulator and I believe I’ve done that.*” Dame Glenys Stacey as she prepares to relinquish the helm at Ofqual
- “*But I am not a dictator.*” Jeremy Corbyn tells the Times Higher how he’s approaching the issue of scrapping tuition fees
- “*Total funding going through FE will go up 13% in real terms by 2020.*” The BIS Secretary talks real terms as he responds to Select Committee questioning
- “*The Dept has missed its (teacher) recruitment targets for the last 4 years and there are signs that teacher shortages are growing.*” The National Audit Office reports on teacher training provision
- “*The time has come to give them equal prominence alongside A’ levels and the IB.*” An independent school headmaster emphasizes the importance of vocational qualifications such as BTECs
- “*You can’t teach grit generically.*” Professor Hattie suggests that’s no way to instil it in young people



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- *“If you’ve got 60 young people coming in and you have to tick 47 boxes about all of them, of course your mind is going to be on that rather than talking to them about their nice shiny shoes and their pet rabbit at home.”* A teacher expresses concerns about the pressures created by the new baseline tests
- *“People need to realise what they say online can really affect people, just because they’re anonymous or online doesn’t make it ok.”* One young contributor adds her thoughts to this week’s Safer Internet Day

Number(s) of the week

- 1948/9. The last time spending on public services (outside of health) was this low according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies
- 2.3%. The CBI’s latest forecast for growth in the UK in 2016 (down from 2.6%)
- £275,000. The average salary for a university vice-chancellor according to a University and College Union report
- £76m. How much is owed to government by graduates who meet the required eligibility criteria
- £751m. How much is expected to be spent on widening participation through university access Agreements by 2019/20 (nearly double that in 2010)
- £700m. What the government spends a year on recruiting and training new teachers
- £1.4bn. How much the government claims to be spending on children’s mental health over this Parliament

What to look out for next week

- Half-term recess