



Pearson

Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 3 June 2016



(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

With EU referendum purdah now in force and half-term on, it's slimmer pickings this week. Yet to misquote the singer Neil Young, education never sleeps and this week's developments offer further evidence of the core issues likely to determine the education agenda for the rest of the year. At present, there are five.

First, reform of the higher education system where the principles are now enshrined in legislation and awaiting a Second Reading. There was a further airing of views, not all positive, at two conferences this week where issues about the market, funding, teaching excellence, regulation and student protection were all raised. Much will depend, as Andy Westwood indicated at the University Alliance Conference, on how things emerge as the Bill goes through Parliament but there have been two further interesting commentaries this week. In Wonkhe, David Morris made the point that the BIS Dept which is leading on the Bill has a lot on its plate and yet is undergoing its own changes; he wondered how the Dept would cope. And the other was from the commentator Rafael Behr who argued that the latest reforms reflect a further important stage in UKHE evolution. Both articles are listed below.

Second, further reform of the skills system where expectation continues to grow about a potential action plan or even white paper on skills provision for young people once the Sainsbury Review details have been confirmed. There are three concerns at present here. One is that the government seems hell-bent on pursuing a dual system: a technical route or a uni route with little in-between; Peter Wilby's 'getting it wrong again' article listed below exposes the weaknesses in this approach. And the other two are both system-based, namely the impact of the area-review reforms on the stability of the provider side and yes, again, the impact of the levy system. Both need to be completed and operative by next spring but will they?

Third, school system reform, where the government's shift from coercion to aspiration has left the bandwagon still rolling with further evidence this week coming from the strengthening of the Regional Schools Commissioner tier. Here too a further paper is promised outlining the criteria to be applied in future but as Warwick Mansell's article listed below indicates, the system is being built on 'rickety structures.'

Fourth, inevitably, funding. A year ago, the Chancellor announced a series of 'cuts' to public spending and followed it up by announcing the thinking behind the Spending Review. The immediate anxieties these raised may have been allayed somewhat but as the Institute for Fiscal Studies have been pointing out and the think tank Reform highlighted this week in the area of schools, efficiencies is the name of the game.

And fifth, teaching, learning and assessment, a topic that even reached the Hay festival this week where the Oxford comma came under scrutiny but also this week where the latest in the Pearson Open ideas series saw Charles Leadbetter issue a robust call for a more dynamic system in his latest Paper.



Pearson

Top headlines this week

- 'Mental health support denied to children.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Teach pupils problem-solving, not just to follow instructions, says former Blair adviser.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Special needs pupils need better support in schools.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Girls more positive about university than boys, new study finds.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [The Problem Solvers](#). Former government adviser and leading 'expert' on creative thinking, Charles Leadbeater considers how to create a more dynamic education system in this latest publication for the Pearson Open Ideas series
- [High tech](#). Guardian columnist Peter Wilby expresses concerns that the government's purported new Skills Plan will repeat past mistakes and calls instead for a high-status tech route starting at age 14 and building on the UTC model
- [What is the National Citizen Service?](#) With the government about to introduce a new National Citizen Service (NCS) Bill making it compulsory for schools and councils to promote the scheme, Sarah Mills, a Lecturer at Loughborough University, explains what it is and how it's growing
- [High on emotion](#). The OECD confirms that it is developing tools to help measure social and emotional skills as well as understand the impact of different learning contexts
- [Re-focus the Northern Powerhouse](#). The Centre for Cities think tank looks at what lessons can be learned from similar cities in Germany and Holland and argues that the Northern Powerhouse should concentrate more on building up local skill levels and productivity and less on designing transport links
- [The Good Country Index](#). Yes there is one, based on the contributions a country makes to the common good relative to its GDP, and the good news is that in the latest ranking the UK comes out on top for its global contribution to science and technology
- [Tackling the low-wage economy](#). The IPPR think tank highlights the importance of developing apprenticeship support and business guidance to help raise productivity in traditional low-wage sectors

HE

- [Lessons from the past](#). David Morris, Deputy Editor of Wonkhe, offers a further evaluation of the recent HE White Paper by assessing it against past policy mishaps to see how far it can avoid similar problems
- [More lessons from the past](#). In a thought provoking article in The Guardian, Rafael Behr argues that while many of the current HE reforms may not be perfect, they may well bring new opportunities and enhanced forms of learning
- [Banking on the future](#). The Times Higher runs its eyes over the financial health of UK universities as they cope with the lifting of the numbers cap, a more competitive market and other policy changes and finds it coping well but planning carefully for an uncertain future



Pearson

- [International HE by numbers](#). Universities UK and the International Unit paint the picture of a diverse and successful international HE system in the UK as they publish the latest facts and figures on international HE
- [Hubs and spokes of UK innovation](#). University Alliance publishes the third in its series of Papers highlighting the important role universities can play in supporting local growth and productivity as part of its response to the government's National Innovation Plan
- [Payback petition](#). A student petition against government plans to freeze the earnings benchmark for when student loans should be paid back has reached over 100,000 signatures, meaning it will be now be up for debate in Parliament

FE/Skills

- [Business nous](#). The 157 Group calls for a new business – orientated skill set for future college leaders to help them cope with the new financial and market pressures afflicting the sector
- [FE in motion](#). The University and College Union put forward 35 motions ranging from pay to Prevent as it debates FE on the second day of its annual congress this week

Schools

- [Built on?](#) Education commentator Warwick Mansell examines some of what he calls 'the more rickety structures' on which the academy system is being built and identifies five in particular (governance, accounting, sponsor supply, local accountability, the Labour legacy)
- [Regional Schools Commissioners](#). Schools Week and the TES both report on the expansion of the RSC system as the first group of deputy directors are appointed to support each of the current Regional Schools Commissioners
- [Who's going to uni?](#) The Sutton Trust issues its latest in a series of reports looking at the hopes and aspirations of young people about higher education and finds views starting to harden at age 14 with girls in particular stressing the importance of going to uni and getting a good degree
- [EU Migrant effect](#). Data crunchers School Dash investigate what effect EU immigration has had on schools and find that most of the impact is localized and when it comes to school performance, is positive
- [Teacher numbers](#). The government calls in the Migration Advisory Committee to consult on the potential for solving some teacher shortages through migration
- [Counting the cost](#). The Reform think tank, which is currently looking at school funding and efficiency, explains that while overall funding will increase in real terms over the lifetime of the Parliament, other pressures will leave schools facing a 5.5% cut in funding by 2019/20
- [SEND in some funds](#). The Key organization publishes new research showing how many schools, particularly in the primary sector are struggling from a lack of funds, delays in processing assessments and local cuts as they try to support learners with special educational needs or disabilities
- [All above board](#). The former secondary head and current chair of Whole Education, John Dunford sets out some basic rules on financial management for heads and other teachers to consider in the light of some recent high profile mismanagement cases



Pearson

Tweet(s) of the week

- He's been a controversial chief inspector but people are going to miss Sir Michael Wilshaw" – [@AnnMroz](#)
- "Every time there is a new fad it tends to be added to the curriculum, however most successful systems teach less" – [@OECDeduSkills](#)
- "Often said we write things down so we don't have to remember them. Our ancestors could recite whole histories. Beware outsourcing thought" – [@tombennett71](#)
- "The government seems poised to get it wrong on technical education again." – [@FEontap](#)
- "Great teaching cannot be captured by soulless algorithms" – [@ChrisParrTHE](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 'Spurious makes us curious.' According to the FT who reported on the matter this week, this is one of the logos on the wall of the office of Full Fact, one of a number of organisations that have grown up in recent times to fact-check alleged spurious claims by politicians and others

Quote(s) of the week

- "What we are learning for seems to be the most important question but politicians aren't at ease asking it" – one of a number of thought-provoking references from Charles Leadbeater in his latest Paper on global learning
- "Dump the tutor and get a life" – The headmaster of Wellington School on how the school's admissions process tries to get behind the tutored child to uncover the intellectually curious and well-rounded one
- "Joining an a multi-academy trust is like marriage without divorce" – one head teacher highlights the importance of a pre-nup when it comes to joining an academy partnership
- "An assault on childhood" – the author Meg Roscoff offers a forthright opinion on the nature of learning in the UK
- "Teachers have to be therapist one moment, social worker the next" – the government's former mental health tsar outlines the pressures on teachers and the school system in general as the numbers of pupils with mental health issues soar
- "Fundamentally I think it quite wrong to punish children for decisions taken by their parents and to run the risk of choosing crucial public service jobs not on the basis of merit but of social engineering" – Lord Waldegrave, Provost of Eton College, takes the government to task on its latest consultation on socio-economic background measures which include whether a child has been to a fee-paying school or not
- "There was no golden age of free university education" – columnist Rafael Behr puts tuition fees in perspective

Number(s) of the week

- 1.7%. The latest growth projection for the UK for 2016 from the OECD's June Economic Outlook
- 6%. The fall in the number of student visa applications over the past year with most coming, according to analysis by the FT, from a decline in applications to the college sector



Pearson

- 61%. The number of young people aged 13/14 who see getting a degree as very important according to latest research from the Sutton Trust
- £5,850. Average spending per pupil by 2019/20, down from a current average of £6,190, according to research from the think tank Reform

What to look out for next week

- FE Week and OCR hosted debate on traineeships with the Shadow Skills Minister (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on teacher supply (Wednesday)
- Jo Johnson addresses the HE Policy Institute Annual Conference (Thursday)