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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 9 September 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

We've learnt quite a lot of things this week, some more substantive than others.

On the less substantive front, we've learnt from the Minister in charge that Brexit means 'the UK leaving the EU;' that's clear then as one twitter comment put it. On the more substantive front we've learnt that many children across the world, 61m according to UNESCO, are still missing out on primary education with targets still some way off being met and, closer to home, that 13m in the UK live in poverty, child poverty is rising and access to 'good' education is a priority.

And in between, we've learnt, unintentionally or not, about the government's plans on grammar schools, Ofqual's plans on GCSE grading, the National Audit Office's views on apprenticeships and a whole lot more (8 reports, 2 keynote speeches, one global ranking, two major events and a committee hearing more) about some of the issues concerning higher education. Newswires and emotions have been high all week. Links to these and other stories below but here are a few standouts to note.

First grammar schools where the government has been bounced into clarification mode following the exposure of a memo from a sharp eyed photographer. School system proposals, and especially selective schools, formed part of the PM's speech this morning and a Green(ing) Paper is following. Debate is likely to be fierce around these matters but for moment the Guardian's summary of Justine Greening's response to an Urgent Question in Parliament, education datalab's summary of evidence as to how far grammar schools help disadvantaged students and Sir Michael Wilshaw's blunt riposte all offer useful context.

Second, Ofqual's announcement on the top grading for new GCSEs where the timing of the announcement (halfway through the teaching of the first 3 subjects for some students,) was more the cause of comment than the statement itself. The new approach should ensure a fairer distribution across all subjects.

Third, apprenticeships where the latest in a string of reports out this summer, this time from the National Audit Office, came as the latest consultation on the levy was closing amidst cries of 'foul' about its impact on more disadvantaged students. The NAO report is a useful reminder that fundamental concerns remain both about the levy and the dash for numbers in particular over quality, outcomes and impact.

Finally, as indicated, it's been a hectic week around HE. Rightly celebrated at two big events this week, UUK's Annual Conference and the Festival for HE, let alone the latest global rankings, UKHE is as ever facing a period of significant change. Much of this was aired in the Committee hearing this week but the extent of it can be seen in some of the wodge of reports out this week on big data, the TEF, research, drop-outs, access agreements and anonymised admissions respectively. Another reading week needed.

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Top headlines this week

- ‘Wilshaw: new wave of grammar schools would take country backwards.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Higher fees allowed for current students.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Two Academies per week need intervention.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Grammar school plans not a return to the past.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘PM plans grammar schools for poorer pupils.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Theresa May’s in-tray](#). The FT provided a useful summary of the issues facing the new(ish) PM including a number with the potential to affect education, (although not grammar schools at this stage,) as MPs reassembled for the new Parliamentary year
- [School system reform](#). In her first major speech on domestic policy, the Prime Minister revealed plans to open out the school system including controversial plans to allow more grammar schools claiming this would help create her much vaunted ‘truly meritocratic society’
- [Brexit means?](#) The Secretary of State for the Dept managing the UK’s exit offered a simple definition of what Brexit means in a Statement to MPs but also confirmed that his Dept would talk to as many bodies as possible including those from education as it considered ways forward
- [A country that works for all?](#) The Joseph Rowntree Foundation listed five key actions including better skills training and education for all, intended to help meet the PM’s ‘No 10 doorstep aspirations’ and ensure a better set of life chances for young people becoming adults in 2030, as part of a major new report into poverty in the UK
- [A world that works for all](#). Unesco’s latest global education monitoring report provided a sober picture of education provision in different parts of the world with targets ranging from primary provision to adult literacy not being met
- [The Gove column](#). Michael Gove will remain in the public eye following this week’s announcement that from next month, he’ll take up his pen as a columnist for The Times

HE

- [Managing the risks](#). Ahead of discussion of the HE Bill by MPs in the Committee Stage, the DfE published a Technical Paper spelling out proposed new regulatory and quality assurance arrangements
- [Brexit ahead](#). Dame Julia Goodfellow, President of Universities UK outlined two key questions and four key issues about Brexit and beyond in her opening address at UUK’s Annual Conference where she confirmed the sector was in good spirits and up for the challenge
- [Bill positions](#). A number of organisations and individuals published their views on the HE Bill as it went to Committee this week including outgoing UUK Treasurer Professor Simon Gaskell who listed six issues he was looking out for



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- **Tackling Wicked Issues.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new Occasional Paper in which three leading commentators offered some thoughts on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the case for some changes
- **Unconscious Bias.** UCAS published its report into 'name-blind' university applications finding no evidence of admissions bias but making a number of recommendations which will see 4 universities (Exeter, Huddersfield, Liverpool and Winchester) test out an anonymous approach this year
- **Funding research.** MillionPlus published a new Briefing Paper calling for a more balanced approach to funding research with a new fund established to support innovation and economic growth
- **Higher Offa.** The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) published details of access agreements approved for university entry in 2017 showing that 94 institutions had increased their targets, that more money for widening access would be available for 2017/18 (up 10%,) but that most institutions were now preparing to raise their fees by inflation for 2017/18
- **Staying the course.** The Social Market Foundation examined the issue of student retention in a new study and found that those institutions placing a high priority on the student experience were reporting high levels of retention but that issues remained for many disadvantaged students
- **Foreign students.** The think tank IPPR called on the government to create a more sophisticated migration target as it published a new report challenging the way in which official figures on those international students who stay on after their courses are collected and used
- **Top ranking.** QS published its latest annual world university rankings showing the UK with four universities (Cambridge, Oxford, UCL and Imperial) in the top ten and 48 in the top 400 but with some concerns about what impact Brexit, funding and reform might have on future rankings

FE/Skills

- **Apprenticeship funding.** The government's summer consultation on funding rates drew to a close with a flurry of concerns about the impact on certain programmes and groups and Labour MPs calling for a rethink
- **Value for money.** The National Audit Office published its long-awaited report into the government's management of the apprenticeship programme noting considerable enthusiasm but raising questions about quality, success factors, returns and risks
- **Responding on loans.** The government confirmed that it was going to take a bit more time to consider things in the light of the Sainsbury Review and would issue a statement later this autumn as it responded to the earlier consultation on maintenance loans in FE

Schools

- **Grammar schools.** The Education Secretary responded to questions on the government's policy towards grammar schools following an Urgent Question tabled by Labour confirming that a Green Paper will follow
- **Checking the evidence.** Education datalab provided a useful summary of the evidence on how far grammar schools supported disadvantaged students, concluding there was still a long way to go
- **Top GCSE grades.** Ofqual responded to recent consultation by announcing modification to the way in which 'top' grades will be awarded to new GCSEs next year to ensure a fairer distribution of top grades



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- **Up and down.** The Education Policy Institute and LSE published research showing that while sponsored academies tended to show improved results just before and after conversion to academy status, this tended to tail off after four years
- **Private tuition and social mobility in the UK.** The Sutton Trust published a report on the private tuition market in the UK showing how its grown (now worth £2bn,) how many teachers moonlight in it (40% of state school teachers) and how some socially disadvantaged groups miss out
- **Keeping children safe.** The DfE published the latest version of its extensive safeguarding guidance for schools and colleges setting out where responsibilities lie
- **London calling.** Sir Michael Wishaw reflected on how far London schools had improved in recent years citing strong leadership as a key factor, in a speech to London Councils
- **Do the Maths.** London Councils published their latest annual report on the pressure on school places in London where the maths involved trying to fit a growing number of secondary school pupils (up 71,580 by 2020) as well as growing numbers of SEND pupils into whatever school places were available
- **On board.** The New Schools Network announced the list of people from education, the media and national and local government, who will form its new Advisory Council and provide advice on the development of the Free School Network
- **Mastering Mandarin.** The government announced the formal roll-out of the Mandarin excellence programme which will help 5000 secondary school pupils master Mandarin Chinese by 2020
- **Dear Justine.** Children’s author Michael Rosen continued his discourse with Education Secretaries by reminding Justine Greening of the stresses and strains that face children embarking on a new school year

Tweet(s) of the week

- “The idea that new grammar schools would help the poor is ‘palpable tosh and nonsense’ says Sir Michael Wilshaw” - [@tes](#)
- “Know how many heads complain to Schools Week about funding and recruitment? All of them. Know how many ask for more grammars? Almost none” - [@miss_mcinerney](#)
- “The biggest revolution in education since ... the last one, a few months ago. Schools becoming the number one policy plaything for pols?” - [@warwickmansell](#)
- “There are more people called Iain giving evidence about apprenticeships at the select committee next week than there are women. Not good enough” - [@shanechowen](#)
- “The % of young people going to university is rising but the pool is diminishing” - [@reformthinktank](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- ‘Selection by house price.’ One of the arguments being used by the government to defend its grammar school policy and which it claims its new policy will help overcome. The extent of the problem was highlighted this week by Lloyds Bank which published evidence indicating that house prices in areas with the best state schools have increased by £76,000 compared to a national increase of £42,145 over the last five years. The story is [here](#)



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- ‘Braconid.’ Apparently it’s a parasitic wasp and it was one of the more obscure words used by a British man to win the 2016 World Scrabble Championship in France last week

Quote(s) of the week

- “It means the UK leaving the European union” – the Brexit Minister opts for the simple version of what Brexit actually means
- “Our wonderful universities need dynamism and imagination if we are to keep ahead” – Sir Anthony Seldon launches the inaugural Buckingham Festival of Higher Education
- “It does feel like lots of things have changed and there is a lot more to play for” – David Hughes assesses the landscape as he takes over from Martin Doel as chief exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC)
- “He had a bee in his bonnet against any publicly organized careers advice and guidance of any description”- one of a number of assertions about Michael Gove in Nick Clegg’s memoirs of his time as Deputy PM
- “Wow, despite that waffle the cat is finally out of the bag” – the Shadow Education Secretary responds to the Education Secretary’s Statement on grammar schools
- “The current admissions system doesn’t help social mobility. Every middle class parent if they’ve got their wits about them, plays the game”- Dame Sally Coates calls for an overhaul of the schools admissions system
- “Research from the University of California suggests that boys take longer to get going in the morning” MPs grapple with teenage habits as they debate boys’ school performance
- “To be strict and allow children to feel that way on their first day of school must be petrifying” – one of the parents of the school where 300 or so pupils were sent home for not wearing the correct uniform

Number(s) of the week

- 30. The number of amendments to the HE Bill put forward by Labour MP and former President of the NUS, Wes Streeting
- £833.5m. How much universities and colleges collectively have pledged to put into widening participation schemes under their 2017/18 access agreements
- 125,000 and 43,000. How many EU students and staff respectively are currently studying and working in UK universities and could be affected by Brexit according to UUK President Julia Goodfellow
- £32m. The amount of deposit money retained annually by landlords at the end of a student lease on the basis of wear and tear, damage, unpaid bills, according to the website money.co.uk who recommend that uni students sign a photo inventory before moving in
- 9.6. The average number of GCSEs taken per independent school candidate this summer according to figures from the Independent Schools Council
- 50% and 70%. The number of school age refugees at primary and secondary level respectively who are out of school according to Unesco’s latest global education monitoring report
- 14%. The rise in the number of appeals on school admissions over the last year following changes made to the way in which data was collected and reported this week by the DfE



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- £24. Average costs for one hour's private tuition, £27 in London, according to the Sutton Trust
- 13m. How many people in the UK are living in poverty according to the latest report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- £366,744. The average price of houses in the catchment areas for England's top state schools according to recent figures from Lloyds Bank
- 17%. How many lunch boxes contained any salad or vegetables, showing little had changed over the last 10 years, according to a survey commissioned by Flora

What to look out for next week

- ResearchED conference (this Saturday)
- Education Committee witness session with the new Education Secretary (Wednesday)
- IPPR event looking at transitions in secondary education at age 14 (Wednesday)
- Pearson sponsored Policy Exchange event on government policy for F/HE (Thursday)
- Wonkhe event on university finances post Brexit (Friday)
- Lib-Dem Annual Conference (Saturday – Tuesday)