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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 15 December 2017

(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

Phew, over 40 reports and announcements in the last few days and counting. They pretty much take in all corners of education but two familiar themes stand out: standards and social mobility.

Under standards first where developments this week have included the latest Annual Report on inspections in schools and colleges from Ofsted, a bunch of papers from Ofqual reflecting on this year's exams, some thoughts from the Education Policy Institute (EPI,) on how to achieve world-class provision in primary schools, an interesting paper from the OECD on how they intend to measure global competence in next year's PISA tests, and on a wider front, a report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life with some disturbing stories of intimidation and a fair bit to say on the responsibilities of social media companies.

There's a lot to take in but in education terms, three messages are perhaps worth noting.

First it's worth remembering that there is plenty of good news out there. Inspection grades for example for secondary schools, special schools and PRUs were all up, there were hints of some stirrings in FE and Amanda Spielman cited 'a general trend of improvement' in her introduction. Second, and on the flip side, as both the Ofsted and EPI reports outlined, significant gaps between high and low performers remain and are proving a hard nut to crack. Some schools, as the Chief Inspector noted, have managed it but as yet there's no easy or settled formula. Third, capacity, can the system cope with constant change and continued demands for improvement? The Ofqual report suggested providers had coped well with things like the new GCSE grading system this summer but, as the Chief Inspector outlined, expertise is spread pretty thin in many areas and schools and colleges need support.

Second, social mobility, where the latest report on uni entry this year from UCAS revealed a continuing gulf between the most and least advantaged and where the Education Secretary launched a new plan to use the various stages of education to help narrow the gap. It remains a policy drumbeat for the government.

The Plan, as with other recent government strategies, was presented as a 'Call to Arms' with partners everywhere urged to put social mobility at the heart of their endeavours. In his recent report, the now ex Social Mobility Commissioner had argued that 'tinkering around the edges will not do the trick.' Whether this Plan will do the trick remains to be seen but it comes with some money, £800m currently, a sense of mission, a list of actions, a promise to be evidence-based and share good practice and some interesting initiatives notably funding and support for teachers and youngsters in challenging areas. Here's hoping

Finally, thank you so much if you've been reading Pearson Policy Watch this year; it's been some journey.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Two year degrees to lower tuition fees.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Global education rankings to measure tolerance.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Weakest schools struggle with teacher burnout.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Wealthy students tighten grip on university places.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘National Colleges best by low recruitment and delays.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Improving social mobility](#). The Education Secretary launched the government’s plan for improving social mobility through education with a series of actions and some funding built around four key education life-stages through from early years to lifelong learning
- [Ofsted Annual Report](#). Ofsted published its latest report on the performance of schools, colleges, early years and social care providers inspected up to August 2017 revealing a fairly familiar picture of some strong performance in schools and some ‘signs of improvement’ in FE but particular concerns about persistent areas of underperformance with, for example, some schools struggling to turn things round
- [Standards in Public Life](#). The Committee on Public Standards which was asked by the PM to report on intimidation in public life published its independent report calling for legislation to be brought forward that would make social media companies liable for illegal content online
- [Future of Work Commission](#). The Commission, convened by Labour’s Tom Watson a year ago, published its report on work in the future calling among other things for a Charter for Good Work, a skills based school curriculum, technical learning trusts and a Whitehall Futures Unit
- [People’s Plan for Digital](#). Labour MP Liam Byrne launched a new website, based on models used abroad, to help draw together thoughts and ideas on how digital policy in this country should develop
- [Local pressures](#). The Local Government Association (LGA) argued that councils were facing a £2.7bn cut over the next couple of years and urged the government not to impose any more cuts and to clarify the position on business rates as part of its forthcoming local government financial settlement
- [Learndirect saga](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) published the results of its investigation into Learndirect covering the period March 2013 to autumn 2017 when a range of controversial funding decisions were made

HE

- [Pressing the accelerator](#). The government launched its consultation on accelerated or two-year degrees currently taken by just 0.2% of students in a handful of providers but which the government claims can help cut costs and encourage greater flexibility in provision
- [Another consultation](#). The Office for Students (OfS) launched a consultation on the level of financial penalty it should be allowed to charge a provider that breaches its regulatory responsibilities



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- **End of Cycle report.** UCAS published the full set of reports and data on entry to university through UCAS this year, highlighting that a record number of disadvantaged 18 year olds had gone on to university and that a huge number of offers had been made this year but that there had been a decline across older age groups and an increasing gap between social groups
- **Senior staff pay.** The Committee of University Chairs (CUC) agreed to publish a new Fair Remuneration Code on senior staff pay in January that will ensure greater transparency and establish clear pay ratios, following a meeting with the Minister
- **Subscription costs.** Wonkhe experts crunched the figures on what level of fees might be needed to run the new Office for Students (OfS) and concluded, perhaps unsurprisingly, that it's going to cost more and institutions will have to pay more in registration fees
- **Meeting local skill needs.** Universities UK followed up the government's recent Industrial Strategy by reporting on the importance of graduate retention for local economies but noting that this varies by region and sector and calling for local partnerships to help match graduate skills to local employer needs
- **It's cooler in the North.** The student accommodation website, Liberty Living, published the results of its survey into hipster or cool unis, something which apparently some $\frac{3}{4}$ of students surveyed look for when choosing a location, where street cred is determined by such as factors as craft beers and street vibes and where Manchester Met, Leeds and Newcastle emerged as the top three

FE/Skills

- **Ofsted verdict.** Ofsted reported that the number of colleges receiving top grades had declined in its latest annual report and that GCSE resits, the levy and funding remained continuing issues but that some signs of green shoots were evident
- **More on skills.** The Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET) published its latest annual skills report based on a survey of engineering companies earlier this year and highlighting in particular, worries about future recruitment of skilled staff and the impact of automation
- **Doing the maths.** The TES reported that the Sixth Form Colleges' Association had raised concerns that the £80m maths premium, announced in the Budget as a way of encouraging more post-16 students to continue with maths, was actually less than seemed because it was to be spread over five years

Schools

- **Ofsted verdict.** Ofsted reported in its annual report that the number of primary schools receiving top grades had remained high while the numbers of secondary schools, PRUs and special schools gaining best grades had risen but that equally a hard core of underperforming schools was failing to improve
- **Primary Class.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) followed up its recent assessment of how secondary school students are performing in England and what would be needed to reach world-class by doing the same for primary school performance, concluding that England compares reasonably well at this level but that there are great regional disparities within this
- **Primary School accountability.** The DfE heralded the 2017 primary performance tables by publishing its latest guide to how primary accountability measures are worked out including what the minimum or floor standard for 2017 is, how a coasting school is defined and how a school's progress score is calculated
- **Summer review.** Ofqual reported in a series of papers on how the exam season had gone this year arguing that given the intensity of demand and the introduction of changes such as the new GCSE



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grade, things had gone pretty smoothly and results had been stable with lessons learned and scrutiny work on such matters as moderation and A' level science already under consideration for the 2018 series

- **Going flexible.** The government reported growing interest in flexible working following its Flexible Working in Schools Summit in October where the DfE, schools and support organisations all pledged to adopt flexi working in some guise
- **Keeping children safe in education.** The government launched further consultation on what schools and colleges need to do to ensure children are kept safe with a number of changes proposed to existing guidance
- **PISA tests.** The OECD outlined the four dimensions of 'global competence' such as 'understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others,' it will seek to measure for the first time in its 2018 tests due to be collated and reported in 2019
- **Closing the gap.** The DfE reported on what was needed to close the attainment gap at GCSE in different regions in England and the impact this could have both on individuals and communities
- **The Pupil Premium.** The House of Commons Library outlined the background, workings and impact of the pupil premium for schools in its latest briefing paper
- **UTCs so far.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published the first of its commissioned reports into UTCs, pointing to strong student motivation in the specialism concerned and the importance of real world contexts but also concerns (from UTCs) about securing employing engagement, funding and student/staff recruitment
- **Sexism in Schools.** The National Education Union and UK Feminista launched a new report into sexism in schools suggesting that schools are currently ill-equipped to tackle the issue and calling for clearer guidelines and better support and training as part of their recommendations
- **History in schools.** The Historical Association published the results of its latest survey into history teaching in English schools highlighting concerns about the demands of the new GCSE leading to some schools squeezing the subject at KS3 with concerns about a lack of support and resources in primary

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Spielman: 12 years in school should give children a lot more than a disposition to learn and some ill-defined skills" - [@tes](#)
- "Spielman: I don't want this to be the annual lecture for criticizing the state of further education but performance continues to lag behind" - [@tesfeneews](#)
- "Because it's the end of term and teachers are all busy, look out for the 7bn important news stories this week from DfE, Ofsted etc" - [@miss_mcinerney](#)
- "There really should be a national snow day policy. If one school closes because of snow, all schools get a snow day" - [@amforrester1](#)

Other stories of the week

- **Sacré bleu.** According to news stories this week, the French government is pushing ahead with a pledge made by Monsieur Macron during his election campaign to ban mobile phones in schools during the



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working day. Apparently the ban will apply to children aged 6 – 15 and will start next September. Many, including unions and some parents, are skeptical about whether it'll be possible to enforce it, although there is some support for it not just in France but here as well. A link to the story in the Guardian is [here](#)

- It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas. The top ten Christmas cracker jokes (well) were published this week, selected from a list sent in via Twitter and given an appropriate thumbs up by a panel of judges and a public vote. They feature leading political figures and current events with one on the PM voted the best. Policy Watch's studied impartiality prevents it being tried out here but the full list can be found under this [link](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "I believe this is the smart thing to do for our country and our economy. But more importantly, it is the right thing to do" – The Education Secretary makes the case for improving social mobility through education
- "I do find myself frustrated with the culture of 'disadvantage one-upmanship' that has emerged in some places" – the Chief Inspector highlights a worrying form of one-upmanship in the latest Ofsted Annual Report
- "Just as one former prime minister famously said 'hug a hoodie,' I'm now asking you to embrace an android" – Labour's Tom Watson urges us to grip a robot as he launches his commissioned review into work in the future
- "The Committee is deeply concerned about the limited engagement of the social media companies in tackling these issues" – the Committee on Standards in Public Life reports on the growing problem of intimidation in public life
- "I think probably for top universities it should be around £350,000 and for others it should be around £150,000 depending on their size and performance" – Sir Anthony Seldon offers his thoughts on Vice Chancellor's pay
- "PISA will assess global competence for the first time ever in 2018" – the OECD's Andreas Schleicher lays the ground for the new global competency 'tests' next year
- "Not every part of the system is yet in sync but we're getting there" – leading curriculum expert Tim Oates tells Schools Week that the curriculum reforms will pay dividends
- "Readily available legal highs" – the NASUWT raises concerns about high energy drinks

Number(s) of the week

- 3.1%. The reported inflation rate for the UK last month, the highest for six years according to the Office for National Statistics
- 533,890. How many students from across the board were accepted on to UK HE courses this year, a 0.2% fall on last year but the second highest figure on record, according to the latest report from UCAS
- 90%, 79% and 80%. The numbers of primary, secondary and FE providers which had been rated good or outstanding in this year's inspections according to Ofsted's Annual Report
- 67. The number of pledges on working flexibly received from schools and support organisations over the last couple of months according to the government



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- 93%. How many staff working in Ofsted have a clear idea of the objectives and purpose of the organization, up 13% on the previous year, according to the latest survey of civil service staff
- 15%. The increase in performance needed in primary school maths in England to reach world-class standard, according to a new report from the Education Policy Institute
- 665. How many primary schools in England are below the new primary school floor standard, according to the latest DfE stats
- £800m. How much the government claims it'll be investing to support disadvantaged people and places under its social mobility plans
- £40.3bn. How much local authorities spent on schools, education and children's services in 2016/17, down £0.7bn on the previous year according to latest government figures
- 57%. How many teachers do lesson planning on their own, one of a number of interesting statistics this week from the invaluable Teacher Tapp available [here](#)
- 8. Apparently the age at which we enjoy Christmas the most, according to a survey conducted by OnePoll.com

What to look out for next week

- 'Chestnuts roasting on an open fire...'