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Scrapping of baseline assessment

Following a series of articles in *Education Journal's* research section on baseline assessment and growing disquiet in the teaching profession, the Government may now scrap its plans for the assessment exercise with reception children.

This was the feeling that surfaced at a research seminar on baseline assessment organised by Newman University last week that we report in our research section. Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said she hoped that the Department for Education would see sense and scrap baseline assessment for reception children. She added that instead, the Government should keep the early years foundation stage profile which was a far more sophisticated assessment of how children developed and it enabled teachers to get to know the children they were teaching.

Dr Bousted urged that Government to put its promises in to action and trust teachers to use their professional judgment to assess four-year-olds. But she also warned the Government to think very carefully before replacing baseline assessment with a "school readiness check" and to continue to listen to teachers as it developed its assessment policy. Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said that time, money and heartache for teachers, children and parents could have been avoided if Government had listened to teachers in the first place.

But she stressed that the Government must fully consult about ideas for any new check, and listen to consultation findings, so it would not repeat the mistakes of Baseline. Ms Blower added that the NUT rejected the notion that any narrow test, be it Baseline Assessment or a "school readiness check", could be used to score children accurately, or to judge the performance of teachers or schools.

MPs pass Education & Adoption Bill

The Education and Adoption Bill, which has completed its passage through Parliament, will see more schools becoming academies. The Schools Minister, Nick Gibb said that the Bill would raise standards in schools by allowing the Government to tackle failure from day one to ensure that swift action was taken wherever a school was not providing high standards of education.

He added that the Bill would now go to Her Majesty the Queen for royal assent, which when given would turn the Bill into an act of Parliament.

In this issue

Editorial

Bacc & Progress 8.
Page 2

News

Assessment.
Secondary places
shortage. NEETs.
Pages 1 to 4

Feature

HMCI.
BAFTA vs BRITS.
Pages 5 and 6

Conference

Morgan. Ofsted.
Pages 7 to 9

Research

Baseline assess.
Pages 10 and 12

Opinion

Carter. Teachers.
Adult education.
Pages 13 to 18

International

Lithuania. OECD.
Page 19

Documents

HE TEF.
Pages 20 and 21

Parliament

HE free speech.
Pages 22 and 23

Bacc for the future

The Edge Foundation is a champion of technical, practical and vocational learning. Its chairman is the former Conservative Education Secretary Lord Baker of Dorking. He was Margaret Thatcher's Secretary of State for Education, and one of the most effective holders of that office. It was on his watch that the Education Reform Act 1988 came into being. After he retired from politics and went to the Lords he teamed up with Ron Dearing to form the Baker Dearing Education Trust and became chairman of the Edge Foundation. In other words, he has been active in education for decades.

Edge are the latest people to join the Bacc for the Future campaign, which aims to reform the English Baccalaureate. Last November the present Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, made a speech to the Policy Exchange think tank in which she outlined her thinking on the development of the EBacc. We have had our doubts about the EBacc since its introduction in 2010. It narrows the curriculum and in its five year existence has already limited choice for students. Under the Government's proposals, that will become even more so as the Ebacc becomes virtually compulsory for secondary school children in England.

Mrs Morgan started that part of her speech on the EBacc by saying: "It must be right that every child studies a strong academic core up until the age of 16." We would argue that that depends on what you mean by a strong academic core. What the Government means is a narrow range of traditional subjects that it claims the Russell Group of universities want everyone to study. This is what they plan to make everyone study at GCSE.

The practical effect of this is to greatly reduce the number of young people studying a range of creative and technical subjects, a trend that is already clear and which will get worse the more that schools follow the Government's direction that everyone must at least attempt the EBacc. The Government is proposing two new accountability measures that will mean young people taking at least seven EBacc GCSEs. Most people take a total of eight subjects. There will therefore be little room for either the rigorous, challenging creative subjects on offer or the vocational subjects approved by the Wolff review.

Our creative industries are important to our economy. As the Minister for Culture, Ed Vaizey, said at the end of January, "the creative industries are one of the UK's greatest success stories ... Growing at almost twice the rate of the wider economy and worth a staggering £84 billion a year, our Creative Industries are well and truly thriving and we are determined to ensure its continued growth and success." This determination, apparently, is not shared by the Department for Education whose actions are resulting in a serious decline in the study of creative subjects that give young people the grounding to go on to work in the creative industries, which 1.8 million people do.

Its not just the creative industries. We have a serious skills shortage in this country. While there were some highly questionable vocational qualifications around, the Government has already culled these. The skills gap will not be closed by a narrow focus on traditional academic subjects studied at GCSE at the expense of subjects like Design and Technology that are more relevant for some pupils.

At present, based on 2015 figures, over 280,000 students would have had to drop at least one subject in order to take the full suite of EBacc subjects. More specifically, 225,000 students would have had to take a foreign language instead of subjects ranging from music and art & design to design & technology and engineering, and 136,000 students would have had to drop a subject and take history or geography instead.

In her speech to Policy Exchange last November the Secretary of State claimed that a variety of questionable exam qualifications were letting down too many young people, and in particular the less able and the poor. But the EBacc is not the only policy option. The Government has also introduced the much more welcome Progress 8 and Best 8 headline school accountability measures. Progress 8 and Best 8 allow creative industry relevant GCSEs and Wolf Review approved vocational qualifications to count towards league tables. They are a far better way of ensuring high standards. Far from forcing the EBacc down the throats of almost all secondary school students, ministers should instead phase it out and go with Progress 8 and Best 8 instead.

Unions respond to LGA secondary places shortage warning

Commenting on the Local Government Association's concerns about a lack of secondary school places, Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said that the school places crisis was entirely of the Government's making.

She agreed with the LGA that local authorities needed to be able to open maintained schools to meet the needs of the communities they served. Ms Blower added that also needed to be able to ensure that existing schools, including academies, would expand when required. Responding to Councils' concern that they will not be able to provide all children with secondary school places, Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said that the increase in pupil numbers was not a surprise.

“Dr Bousted insisted that the free school experiment had failed in its most important purpose, to ensure that every child had a local school place”

But she argued that the Government had let children down by not planning properly and it was failing in its fundamental duty to provide a school place for every child. Dr Bousted insisted that the free school experiment had failed in its most important purpose, to ensure that

every child had a local school place. She called on the Government to restore local authority's powers as they knew their local area and should therefore be able to respond to local need. Dr Bousted pointed out that the admissions arrangements also needed to be examined urgently as the current situation was letting down many children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Disabled children are being kept out of playgrounds

Acharity has warned that disabled children are prevented from making friends and enjoying playtime because playgrounds and playgroups are not accessible. The Sense report pointed out that most parents of disabled children also cite negative attitudes from other parents a key barrier to accessing mainstream play.

The three-month Case for Play inquiry into the issue, chaired by former Education Secretary Lord Blunkett, found that disabled children were missing out on play opportunities that were vital to their emotional, social and physical development. The report blames insufficient funding at a local level, and negative attitudes to disabled children and their families. The inquiry heard from the families of 175 disabled children, with multiple needs, and it received a further 175 pieces of evidence.

A survey of the families revealed that nine out of 10 believed that their child did not have the same chances to play as other children. Two-thirds said that they did not have enough information on accessible play opportunities in their area, while just over half had been turned away from play settings that had failed to meet their duties under the Equality Act. The report also highlighted the need for a strategic approach to funding play for children with multiple needs at a local or a national level across England.

“Nine out of 10 parents said that their child did not have the same chances to play as other children”

NEETs in England at record low

The are almost 100,000 fewer 16- to 24-year-olds not in education, employment or training compared to same period last year, according to official figures. The Skills Minister, Nick Boles, announced that the NEET rate was at its lowest for the time of year since comparable records had begun in 2000.

The figures based on Labour Force Survey data, compared to the same period over different years, showed that the proportion of:

- 16- to 18-year-old NEETs had fallen by 0.4 percentage points to 6.6 per cent, a fall of 12,000 year on year to the lowest level since 2000.
- 16- to 24-year-old NEETs had fallen by 1.5 percentage points to 11.6 per cent, down 97,000 year on year and at its lowest rate since 2000.
- 19- to 24-year-old NEETs had fallen by 2.1 percentage points to 13.8 per cent, a reduction of 86,000 on the previous year.

Commenting on the figures, Claudia Harris, CEO of The Careers & Enterprise Company, pointed out that the figures showed that in October to December the number of NEETs had increased by 5,000 on the previous quarter. She stressed that research had showed that young people who had had multiple encounters with business while at school were significantly less likely to be NEET and earn, on average, 18 per cent more than peers who had not.

Interim Chief Regulator appointed

Ofgcal has announced that its current Chairman, Amanda Spielman, will act as Interim Chief Regulator following the departure of Dame Glenys Stacey at the end of February and until her successor's arrival. The Department for Education will announce Dame Glenys' successor in due course.

Secondary schools oversubscribed again

England's secondary schools were over-subscribed again this year. Over 10,000 more children applied for places in the ten worst areas than there are places available. Yet for parents this is something of a post code lottery. Far from there being a shortage of places, in some parts of the country the lack of pupils is giving some secondary schools a serious budget problem as their numbers have fallen with too few pupils to fill all the available places even in good and popular schools.

Most of the problem is in urban areas. Of the 15 local authorities with the biggest problems, only two were county council areas. The worst area was the London borough of Hounslow, which had 2,907 places available at schools in the area but 5,150 pupils applying for them. This was followed by Buckinghamshire, Trafford, Kent and Haringey. The increase in competition for places in some areas has led to an increase in appeals, which rose by 10 per cent between 2014 and 2015. Here the results are even more of a lottery than with initial applications. The success rate varies from 100% success in the Isle of Wight and North Somerset and zero success in Portsmouth.

To be successful at appeal a parent has to be well organised and know what they are doing, or have the funds to hire a lawyer who does. Imogen Jolley, head of Education Law at law firm Simpson Millar, said: "Parents tend to launch appeals based on their child's academic strengths rather than focusing what is required under the School Admission Appeal Code. The Independent Appeal Panel is not concerned with which school is the best academically for your child, but whether missing out on their first choice will be of genuine detriment. A well evidenced case of harm to the social, emotional or medical needs of the child or a close family member, if the child does not attend that school, is likely to be successful."

HMCI calls for “golden handcuffs” to stop exodus

In his monthly commentary, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, blamed the growing “brain drain” of classroom talent overseas for fuelling teacher shortages in England. He warned that England had a serious teacher recruitment and retention challenge on its hands and added that the nation was simply not attracting enough new entrants into the profession and those that were attracted were not applying to the schools where they were needed most.

Sir Michael called for action to address the growing imbalance because a school, and a school system, was only ever as good as its teachers. But he pointed out that the signs were far from positive, following a recent report from the National Audit Office which had revealed that the Government had missed its recruitment targets for the past 4 years. The Chief Inspector acknowledged the difficulty in recruiting teachers in an improving economy, but he added that the growing number of teachers who were going through the training system but were then opting not to take up jobs in English state schools was compounding the problem.

He said that while some were moving straight into the independent sector, a growing number of recently trained and newly qualified teachers were flocking abroad to work in the rapidly expanding international school sector. Sir Michael pointed out that elite public schools were opening up international branches across the globe, especially in the Gulf States and the Far East. He added that two years ago, there had been 29 overseas franchises, but at the end of 2015, there had been 44 and several new campuses were scheduled to open soon. The Chief Inspector cited a 2015 International School Consultancy survey which had found that the number of teachers who had left the United Kingdom to teach in English language international schools, at 18,000, had been higher than the 17,000 who had qualified as teachers through the traditional post-graduate training route in England. He warned that recruitment agencies were actively targeting both newly qualified teachers and more experienced classroom professionals from England.

Sir Michael stressed that to make things even worse, debt-laden NQT's were being tempted by a rule change which allowed some of them to complete their induction overseas. He argued that if newly qualified teachers spent the first vital few years of their careers overseas, particularly in institutions that may place little value on continuous professional development they would not have a secure foundation. Sir Michael agreed with those who wanted to “talk up” the teaching profession in England and raise its status and he stressed the need for the Government to gain a better understanding of the scale of the exodus of teaching talent abroad as well as its causes because official figures were hard to come by.

He pointed out that having spoken to head teachers who had recruited from abroad to plug vacancy gaps, some overseas teachers adapted quickly to the new demands placed on them. But he added that others found it difficult to get to grips with the particular culture of English schools and the curriculum, assessment and examination regime. Sir Michael therefore urged policymakers to consider the idea of some form of “golden handcuffs” to keep teachers working in the state system that trained them for a period of time.

Responding to the comments made by the Chief Inspector, Chris Keates, General Secretary of the NASUWT, said that the situation was another stark consequence of government policy. She added that the public education service was haemorrhaging teachers, but they were not just going abroad; as equal numbers were leaving teaching to go to other more financially competitive jobs in the UK. Ms Keates said it was ridiculous to talk about golden handcuffs when one of the biggest problems was that schools were not offering newly qualified teachers permanent posts. She added that while the current recruitment bursaries placed restrictions on teachers, it was not maintaining teacher numbers.”

Russell Hobby, General Secretary of school leaders' union NAHT welcomed the chief inspector's signal that England had a serious teacher recruitment and retention challenge on its hands, which the Government had failed to prioritise. He urged the Government to look into why some teachers were choosing to work abroad at a time of shortages in the UK.

BAFTA winners twice as likely to have been to private school as BRIT winners

Ahead of the BRIT awards, new Sutton Trust research revealed that top award-winning British actors were over twice as likely to have been educated at an independent school as award-winning British pop musicians. Forty-two per cent of top BAFTA winners attended an independent school, compared to 19 per cent of BRIT award winners.

One reason appears to be the success of the state-funded BRIT school in Croydon, which educated Adele, Imogen Heap and Jessie J, amongst other famous artists. But the difference in the educational backgrounds of the two groups presents new evidence on how accessible they are to talented young people from low and middle income backgrounds.

The findings were presented in *Leading People 2016*, a new report by the Sutton Trust which maps the educational backgrounds of leading figures in ten areas: the military, medicine, politics, civil service, journalism, business, law, music, film and Nobel Prizes. The UK's top professions remain disproportionately populated by alumni of independent schools. In the military nearly three quarters (71 per cent) of the top officers in the country had attended independent schools, while 12 per cent had attended comprehensive schools. The proportion was slightly less than with the country's top judges of whom nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) had attended independent schools. In journalism, over half (51 per cent) of leading print journalists had been educated privately and less than one in five had attended comprehensives. But state school students were slightly better represented in medicine: of a sample of the country's top doctors, 61 per cent had been educated at independent schools, nearly one quarter at grammar schools (22 per cent) and the remainder (16 per cent) at comprehensives. In business, a high proportion of FTSE 100 chief executives had attended schools overseas, but of those who had been UK educated, 34 per cent had attended private schools.

In politics, nearly a third (32 per cent) of MPs had been privately educated as had half of the Cabinet but only 13 per cent of the Shadow Cabinet. Sir Peter Lampl, chairman of the Sutton Trust and of the Education Endowment Foundation, said that as well as academic achievement an independent education tended to develop essential skills such as confidence, articulacy and team work which were vital to career success. He argued that the key to improving social mobility at the top would be to open up independent day schools to all pupils based on merit not money as demonstrated by the Sutton Trust's Open Access scheme, as well as supporting highly able students in state schools.

The report by Dr Philip Kirby, Sutton Trust research fellow, pointed out that young people from more advantaged backgrounds also often had broader professional social networks, which could be used to access certain jobs, as well as parents who may be more able to support them through unpaid internships, which were increasingly important for career development. But the report stressed that there were economic, cultural and societal benefits to opening up the UK's top professions to a more diverse talent pool. The report recommended that:

- The Government should develop an effective national programme for highly able state school pupils.
- The Sutton Trust has pioneered the Open Access scheme, where entry is on the basis of merit not money, which provides low and middle income students access to top independent day schools. This programme should be supported nationally to widen access to leading universities and improve social mobility at the top of the professions.
- After four weeks, all interns should be paid the National Living Wage. Internships are often vital for career development, but inaccessible to those from less advantaged backgrounds.
- More companies should sign up to the Government's Social Mobility Business Compact, a commitment to ensure recruitment practices eliminate barriers to social mobility. This should be strengthened to require far greater transparency about diversity – including pay gaps associated with gender and education – and recruitment practices.

Nicky Morgan speaks to the Association of Colleges

The Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, addressed college principals, vice principals and chairmen of governors from the further education sector at an Association of Colleges event. She thanked Martin Doel for leading the sector through a period of substantial change as he prepared to leave his role at the Association of Colleges.

The minister added that she would look forward to seeing the results of his research as the Professor for Further Education and Skills at UCL's Institute of Education. She told delegates that a core academic grounding in maths and English remained crucial to the education of young people irrespective of their post-16 choices. Ms Morgan said that the huge increase in the numbers of young people who had not secured English and maths A* to C at GCSE at 16 who were continuing to study was a triumph for the sector. She stressed that focusing on developing the skills, knowledge and character traits that would make young people employable were important as a basis for securing a lifetime of sustained employment.

The minister said that while steps had been made following the trailblazing Wolf Review, the system remained confusing and unnecessarily complex as there were are over 13,000 qualifications available to 16- to 18-year-olds. She added that the Government would be simplifying the over-complex skills system by creating up to 20 new technical and professional routes to skilled employment in direct partnership with employers and colleges. Ms Morgan said that technical and professional skills would be addressed through the Government's strategy on new technical and professional routes and requirements for English and maths.

But she added that young people also needed softer skills which were often associated with the development of good character. The minister challenged the college chairmen and principals to work more with employers to deliver the right skills for students and local community and develop the character of students more to enable them to succeed in the work place and be fully prepared for adult life. She pointed

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out that the Government's skills reform package would be anchored in quality as it would be supported by the Institute for Apprenticeships which would ensure that the standards matched the requirements of employers in every sector.

Ms Morgan noted that only 37 per cent of apprenticeship funding was going toward colleges, compared to 60 per cent to independent training providers. She stressed that while competition was healthy for the sector, it

was time for colleges to step up to the plate and forge lasting links with employers to make them the “go to” provider of apprentices in their local community. Turning to area reviews, the minister said that difficult decisions would have to be made.

She said that for some it would involve mergers to take account of scale economies or the ability to rationalise the estate, while for others, it would mean ensuring that the curriculum was mapped with student and employer demands. Ms Morgan said that although the Government wanted to support colleges as they went through the process, it recognise that it must be locally-led. She argued that high-quality leadership teams in financially resilient institutions would be able to deliver on the shared commitment to improve the skills and life chances of young people. The minister added that the first wave of reviews had started to produce the kinds of outcomes that would help to meet those aims.

Nicky Morgan starts her campaign for staying in the EU

The Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan addressed education and business leaders about government reforms and her ambition to give children a “world-class” education. At the Guildhall, in London, she explained that one of the key reasons she would be campaigning for the United Kingdom to remain in the European Union was because she believed that the next generation would be stronger, safer and better off in a reformed Europe.

Ms Morgan added that she wanted the next generation to be able to take advantage of the opportunities access to the single trade free market brought such as: jobs, investment, lower prices and financial security. She warned that the alternative, “leap in the dark”, would risk economic security and lead to years of damaging uncertainty when young people were trying to take their first steps in life. The minister pointed out that a Britain that was cut off from the world would mean limited prospects and opportunities for young people.

Leaders in Manchester and Liverpool get a roasting from Ofsted

Ofsted’s Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, spoke to delegates at a seminar organised by the Institute for Public Policy Research think-tank in London about education in Manchester and Liverpool. He said that although logistical difficulties had made it impossible for him to make his speech in Manchester, the irony of pronouncing on education in the North from the “smug” South had not been lost on him.

Sir Michael pointed out that of the 16 local authorities nationally with the poorest performing secondary schools, 13 were above a line from the Bristol Channel to the Wash. He said that Manchester and Liverpool illustrated the scale of the problem as 3 in 10 secondary schools in Manchester and four in 10 in Liverpool required improvement or were inadequate compared to 1 in 10 in inner London. But the Chief Inspector added that the situation in some of their satellite towns was even worse as a third of the schools in Rochdale were not good enough and the proportion was similar in Salford.

He added that in Oldham, 6 in 10 secondaries required improvement or were inadequate and in Knowsley not a single secondary school was good or better. Sir Michael said that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds fared particularly badly. He explained that Manchester and Liverpool were at the core of the ambitions for a northern powerhouse as they were the engines that could transform the prospects of the entire region. But Sir Michael pointed out that as far as secondary education was concerned, they were not “firing on all cylinders”, in fact, they seemed to be going into reverse.

He said that the proportion of Manchester’s pupils gaining good GCSEs had declined from 51.4 per cent 2 years ago to the current 47.5 per cent now and in Liverpool, the percentage had fallen from 49.9 to 48.6 per cent over the same period. The Chief Inspector said that although several commentators had argued that disadvantage explained the difference, if poverty was the culprit, why were primary schools in the North and Midlands doing so well. He pointed out that some had claimed that it was not poverty but ethnicity that accounted for the discrepancy. Sir Michael said that while London benefited disproportionately because 37 per cent of its citizens had been born overseas, 25 per cent of residents in Manchester were foreign-born. He added that Leicester, which had a minority white British population, was one of the worst performing local authority areas as only half of its pupils achieved 5 good GCSEs. The Chief Inspector pointed out that conversely in Newcastle, where 85 per cent of secondary schools were good or

(Continued on page 9.)

(Continued from page 8.)

better and where on average 57.3 per cent of students achieved 5 good GCSEs, only 6 per cent of its citizens had been born overseas.

He acknowledged that inner-London boroughs had historically benefited from much higher-per-pupil funding than elsewhere because they had been among the most deprived. But Sir Michael added that Manchester and Liverpool also did relatively well, especially when the effects of increased London pay were stripped out. He pointed out that Nottingham, which had one of the highest-per-pupil funding settlements in the country outside London, had one of the worst records at secondary as only 42.4 per cent of its young people had achieved 5 good GCSEs, including English and maths, last year.

The Chief Inspector pointed out that Manchester and Liverpool boasted 8 universities between them, 2 of which were among the top 200 in the world. But he questioned why the cities which could provide a world-class education for young people at 18, failed to do so for too many at 11. Sir Michael argued that, at some point, politicians in Manchester and Liverpool would have to accept that the Northern Powerhouse would splutter and die if their young people lacked the skills to sustain it.

He called on mayors, council leaders and cabinet members, to stand up and be counted, and shoulder the responsibility for their local schools and

challenge and support them regardless of whether they were academies or not. Sir Michael also urged them to make education in general, and their underperforming secondary schools in particular, a central target of their strategy for growth. He stressed that it was not possible to fight for social mobility with political immobility. Sir Michael added that politicians needed to act with “grit, imagination, faith and bloody mindedness”, which were qualities that were no less common in the North than they were in the South.

Ofsted’s Regional Director for the North West, Chris Russell, echoed Sir Michael’s concerns in an open letter to all those responsible for overseeing education provision across Greater Manchester. In his letter, Mr Russell said that the decline in the attainment of secondary school pupils is particularly disappointing given the significant level of investment through the Greater Manchester Challenge. He has written a similar open letter to those responsible for education provision in Knowsley, where there was not a single good or outstanding secondary school.

Responding to the Chief Inspector’s comments, Chris Keates, General Secretary of the NASUWT, said that armed with the provisions of the Education and Adoption Bill, the Government would use Sir Michael’s statements as the justification to “ride roughshod” over the views of parents and local communities and embark on a programme of academisation. She added that while championing high standards was one thing, acting as the advance guard for the next phase of ideologically driven structural change was quite another.

Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, argued that the “supply-side” model of education that a lack of skills could be the cause of economic problems was fundamentally flawed because it fell into the usual trap of blaming education for everything rather than looking at the underlying causes of the uneven and unfair economic system. She insisted that youth unemployment and slow economic growth was driven primarily by lack of investment in jobs, infrastructure and development. Ms Blower also argued that Sir Michael’s call to local politicians was misguided as many schools in the areas in question had become academies and as such local authorities did not have the ability to intervene or to help the schools improve as they had with maintained schools. She added that local authorities had also faced severe cuts to their budgets, partly as a result of the academies programme.

“ The Chief Inspector called on mayors, council leaders and cabinet members, to stand up and be counted, and shoulder the responsibility for their local schools and challenge and support them regardless of whether they were academies or not.”

Baseline Assessment: what research is telling us

A report from an invitation research seminar held in Newman University on 24 February 2016

By Professor Margaret M Clark OBE
Newman University

This is the fourth in a series of articles on baseline assessment; the three previous articles were published in *Education Journal* issues 244, 258 and 259. The articles in issues 258 and 259 give further information on the papers at the seminar by Louise Wormwell and Guy Roberts-Holmes. From 2016 the Government has indicated that it expects all children in reception class in England to be assessed within a few weeks of starting school on one of three baseline assessments, and in English, the scores to be used for accountability and to assess children's progress by the end of Key Stage 2.

This policy has aroused concern among many professionals. On 24 February an invitation research seminar, *Baseline Assessment: what research is telling us*, which I convened jointly with Professor Terry Wrigley, Visiting Professor, Northumbria University, was held at Newman University. In this article I summarise the eight papers presented at the seminar and highlight the issues raised during the discussion. The summaries and discussion will be made available online shortly. A flavour of the range of research presented can be gained from the brief quotes from the summaries:

1. *Why it is better without baseline assessment. 4 core reasons.* Nancy Stewart, Principal Consultant, Early Learning Consultancy stated that many education experts and teaching unions are strongly opposed to the introduction of these standardised on-entry assessments on a number of well-evidenced grounds, including that:

- a)** Many children are already being wrongly labelled as achieving below typical standards, with harmful effects;
- b)** The assessments disrupt children's introduction into school;
- c)** The narrow focus on attainment in prescribed subject areas is harmful to children's learning and development in the early years;
- d)** The planned system will not provide a useful indicator of school quality.

See <http://www.betterwithoutbaseline.org.uk> for further information.

2. *Baseline assessments: who made the cuts and why?* Louise Wormwell, Newman University quoted The Standards and Testing Agency, May 2014 as claiming: "The purpose of the reception baseline is to support the accountability framework and assess school effectiveness by providing a score for each child at the start of reception....as the basis for an accountability measure of relative progress of a cohort of children through primary school." She also drew attention to a significant disturbing point in the guidance in 2014 under the sub-heading of 'Minimising bias', "A particular focus should be given to pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) to ensure that the progress measure is not unduly beneficial to schools with high proportions of EAL children." See *Education Journal* Issue 258 for her article with the same title.

3. *Baseline assessments: the delusions of 'predictive validity'.* Terry Wrigley, Visiting Professor, Northumbria University took as his focus "the claims and assumptions that baseline tests can form a reliable starting point for evaluating the value-added by the school, and the dangers posed to children by assumptions that they can accurately assess 'ability' or 'potential'. The presentation was based on a study of documents, interviews and data secured as the result of a Freedom of Information request. He stressed that his criticisms are not of the organisations per se, but of the whole policy "which is deeply flawed". He warned that many children are "particularly at risk of receiving teaching which is premised on the

"This policy has aroused concern among many professionals."

assumption that they have limited potential”.

4. *Which abilities of 4 year olds predict later academic achievement? Developmental evidence and implications for early assessment.* David Whitebread, University of Cambridge argued that if the purpose of making baseline assessment of children’s capabilities is “ultimately to improve the quality of their education” then we should bear in mind that “the BA models currently on offer are likely to be inaccurate, unreliable and potentially harmful, as they are in danger of negatively impacting on the crucial first few weeks of children’s experience of their primary school”. Whitebread, D., Pino-Pasternak, D. and Coltman, P. (2015) *Making learning visible: the role of language in the development of metacognition and self-regulation in young children.* In S. Robson and S. Quinn (eds) *The Routledge International Handbook of Young children’s Understanding.* London: Routledge: 199-214.

5. *Reception Baseline Research: views of teachers, school leaders, parents and carers.* Sarah Lynch, National Foundation for Educational Research reported the findings of an independent research commissioned by DfE between October and December 2014. The aim of the research was to inform the implementation of the reception baseline and identify effective ways of communicating the results to parents/carers. The research was an online survey plus telephone interviews and focus groups of parents. The majority of respondents were positive to some extent about the introduction of baseline assessment. However, all the schools surveyed were already using some form of on-entry assessment and most schools were already using the outcomes of existing on-entry assessments as evidence for accountability.

The report is available

at <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/DFER01home.cfm>.

6. *The Introduction of Baseline Assessment: views of head teachers, teachers and parents.* Guy Roberts-Holmes, UCL, IoE, London reported the main findings of the NUT/ATL sponsored research carried out in the autumn of 2015 involving a nationwide survey and five case studies in primary schools. They found that, “For many teachers, baseline assessment has had a negative impact on their working lives without benefiting the children they teach”.

Teachers and headteachers see all three baseline assessment providers as inaccurate, unreliable and lacking in validity and hence its ability to accurately measure the ‘value added’ by schools. The report was published online on 12 February 2016 on ATL’s website atl.org.uk and NUT’s website: www.teachers.org.uk/baseline.

7. *Reception teachers’ and heads of schools’ perspectives and experiences of an observation based assessment that focuses on child-initiated activity,* Sally Howe and Michelle Cottle, University of Roehampton. The research, funded by the Froebel Trust, between October 2014 and March 2015, studied the experiences of a group of teachers and head teachers as they piloted Early Excellence. “Some teachers talked about having to organise specific or more structured activities in order to complete the baseline assessment within the time constraints dictated by government policy”. They felt that it may not be valid for children with special needs and children with English as an additional language and “raised questions about the validity of relying on assessments that focus mainly on literacy and numeracy on entry to school”. Brogaard Clausen, S., Guimaraes, S., Howe, S. and Cottle, M. (2015) *Assessment of young children on entry to school: informative, formative or performative?* in the *Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education.* Vol.6, Issue 1.

8. *Baseline Assessments: their value and validity in assessing young children on entry to school,* Margaret M. Clark, Newman University. This is a small ongoing study in five schools. Seven teachers involved in baseline assessment in 2015 were interviewed. What is unique is that we have details not only of the children’s scores on the baseline assessment but also their sex, date of birth, whether they attended the school’s nursery class and if so if that teacher assessed them, and if English is not their mother tongue,

“For many teachers, baseline assessment has had a negative impact on their working lives without benefiting the children they teach”. Teachers and headteachers see all three baseline assessment providers as inaccurate, unreliable and lacking in validity and hence its ability to accurately measure the ‘value added’ by schools.”

which language they do speak. In three schools with a total of 117 reception children assessed there are 52 children who speak at least one other language; 16 different languages in addition to English are spoken by children in these four reception classes. We plan to analyse the results for 2015, extend the study to include further schools and make an assessment of selected children on a diagnostic language test.

Key issues raised in the discussion

There were 60 participants at the seminar, staff from universities, teachers and advisers and representatives from the teachers' unions. No one challenged the strength of the research evidence against the proposed baseline assessment policy, stressing that this was not a criticism of specific providers but of the policy itself. The major focus in the discussion was on how to alert parents to the precise nature of this policy and its damaging effects on children by its deficit model of prediction and by labelling children; its effect on the practice in schools in the children's early weeks in reception class and the strain it was placing on teachers to implement a policy in which they did not believe and which they felt added nothing to the knowledge they had or could get from other sources. I noted two researches cited in

Education Journal the previous day (Issue 260). Save the Children stated that "the research demonstrated that the most crucial determinant of success in Sats tests was how well children could communicate when they started school" (p. 6). A new paper by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report revealed "that 40% do not access education in a language they understand" and, to quote from page 12: "A review of 40 countries' education plans found that less than half recognised the importance of teaching children in their home language, particularly in early grades."

In view of the data we are collecting in our ongoing research on the variety of languages spoken by young children in many reception classes in England, it would appear that DfE pays insufficient attention to researches such as these!

"No one challenged the strength of the research evidence against the proposed baseline assessment policy, stressing that this was not a criticism of specific providers but of the policy itself. The major focus in the discussion was on how to alert parents to the precise nature of this policy and its damaging effects on children by its deficit model of prediction and by labelling children..."

Footnote

On 25 February in <http://schoolsweek.co.uk> in an article "Baseline assessments could be scrapped over comparability concerns" it is claimed that following a study commissioned by DfE it has been found that "tests from the three chosen providers for baseline assessments of reception children cannot easily be compared – putting the policy's future in doubt". "Government officials would not confirm the content of the study".... To quote: "A mooted alternative to baseline test is the introduction of 'school readiness' checks – an option said to be preferred by No 10. Such checks assess children's ability to hold pencils or read basic words and have been widely debated in the US.

Should such an alternative be proposed not only is further research needed with a shift in focus, but reference back to existing research over many years showing the unreliability of such tests of so-called 'school readiness'.

Man and superman? We got Carter but do we get Carter?

Chris Waterman takes stock of the new kid on the block and his place in the education firmament

I seem to recall, albeit dimly, Sir Michael Wilshaw being asked by the Select Committee, on his first appearance, about a story that had appeared in the press about him being similar to Clint Eastwood. When pressed HMCI opted for *Dirty Harry*, rather than “the man with no name.” With the benefit of hindsight, I’m sure the Blowers and Bousteds would agree with his choice.

Sir David Carter, the new Schools Commissioner, shares a family name with Jack Carter, the cold-blooded London gangster who returns to the North East on a mission of vengeance. They both, of course, have a mission, but Sir David’s seems to be hunting down 100 failing academies – a sort of vengeance, I suppose. On meeting him, however, he seems an altogether more subtle character, perhaps closer to Michael Caine’s interpretation of Milo Tindle (aka Inspector Doppler) in the film of Anthony Shaffer’s play *Sleuth*.

Sir David chose to give the TES an “exclusive” first interview last week, perhaps in exchange for: being the cover pin-up; having the same full-page picture on page 23 and two more full page pictures on pages 27 and 29. Perhaps his sequel should be a remake of *Fallòdellevanità* (*Bonfire of the Vanities*) or even *Fallòdelleparolacce*, unless he cuts it with the professional associations, that is. Although Sir David has some pretty small shoes to fill – remember Frank Green – the stall he sets out could, under the current government turn into a department store, with two regions on each of four floors. Will the DfE soon be reclaiming the “lost floors of Sanctuary Buildings” from HS2?

Sir David’s history is remarkably similar to that of Sir Michael Wilshaw: he was a secondary teacher; he was a secondary head teacher; he was head of an academy chain; and he has a big national job impacting on every school in England (once 100% academisation has been realised).

There are some things to be grateful for: Sir David did a degree or two in music; for his PGCE he also did music; was born in Wales; has always worked many miles from Westminster. There are, however, some questions to be asked of anyone who steps up from 13 schools to twenty odd thousand. The first questions is why, on his ex-employer’s web-site, the words “good school” appear, in quotes, on every school in the inspected list bar one. Perhaps it’s because “inadequate” would spoil the look. Another question is why, according to Richard Vaughan, he turned up mob-handed for the interview, flanked by two minders and one of Nicky Morgan’s spads? Third question is how important his “stand-out characteristic” – the ability to memorise names – is to making a success of the job?

This may sound slightly more negative than my usual tone with a new kid, but, depending on who gets the Ofsted job and what the DfE decides to do with it, the Schools Commissioner could be one of the biggest jobs in education in England. It’s a heavy responsibility to carry with the support of only eight regional commissioners, each supported by a small team of elected head teachers and a handful of administrators. Whether he becomes “a new high king of accountability” or the lord high executioner of government policy, his own accountability to the Secretary of State is much less desirable even than the situation at Ofsted, which at least has a, sort of independent, board.

Schools in the future could have a triple accountability that is nothing to do with parents, staff or the local community:

- The first accountability will be to the multi-academy trust (one of which has decided to get rid of school governors).
- The second accountability, of sorts, will be when Ofsted turns up.
- The third accountability will be to the Schools Commissioner, via the regional *nabobs*.

If all the trusts, inspectors and commissioners stretched out in a line they might stretch from here to eternity. Whether that will mean high noon for coasting academies only time will tell.

Getting the best teachers in front of every student

Chris Waterman looks at some strategies to provide high quality teaching in schools in England

I don't want to get into the debate about how difficult teacher supply is, which now seems polarised between the TES proclaiming "How the DfE has failed to arrest teacher shortages" and the DfE's correct, but partial, reply that "the proportion of trainee teachers with a top degree has grown, faster than in the population as a whole, and there are more teachers overall." Nor will I deal in detail with HMCI's comments about England's latest export success – other than to ask what the Ofsted regime has done to help boost those exports. It's not about continually weighing the pig, so to speak, it's about fattening it. To mix metaphors, shroud waving, with one notable exception, has never resulted in resurrection.

Since the establishment of SATTAG (Supply and Training of Teachers Advisory Group) some two years ago, all of the key players in teacher training and supply, plus professional associations, subject associations and schools have met regularly to map out a way forward.

A year ago, the manifesto produced by SATTAG members called for a national strategy. SATTAG members have given written evidence to the Education Select Committee. Neil Carmichael MP, who chairs the committee, is continuing the work with a substantial inquiry into the teaching profession. The All Party Parliamentary Group for the Teaching Profession will be considering its programme of work when it next meets on 18 April 2016.

Meanwhile, there are two specific "quick win" areas where action could be taken to help improve the supply of high quality, appropriately trained teachers that we will continue to need. Both of these actions are low-cost and both of them are achievable.

Improving the information for prospective and returning teachers

What would really simplify the process of getting into teaching, or returning to teaching would be a "plain guide" to routes into teaching, with diagrams, which could be downloadable as well as online. There is a plethora of material available but not a single source offering objective advice about the pros and cons. The "Get into teaching" website is helpful, but only after you have made a firm decision that you would like to return to teaching or become a teacher.

Career changers, who would add significantly to the maturity and security of the profession, would also benefit from a comprehensive information pack that set out all of the options for those wishing to change careers. This information should include how employers might assist an employee wishing to change career. In the case of potential redundancy, it should be possible to arrange a funding package supported by the employer, the DfE and the host school (in the case of a school-based course).

Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses

Subject knowledge enhancement courses are many and varied, as a quick search on the internet shows. There are courses on offer from all manner of HEI's and other, private, providers. What is not obvious from the DfE



Chris Waterman

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spreadsheet directory, which puts you straight through to each of the providers, is any indication of quality. The footnote to the overview table makes it clear that: “The information presented in this document comes from third party sources and does not constitute or represent the views, opinions or policies of the NCTL or the DfE.”

There is no qualitative analysis of the courses, which is surprising as they are generously funded by the DfE. Nor is there any comparison between the various types of delivery, with some courses lasting 32 weeks being delivered totally online.

The two options for some sort of quality mark are: to include them under Ofsted’s umbrella, but Ofsted looks fully-occupied; or to set up a sector-led quality assurance scheme, with both leadership of and participation in the scheme by the consumers.

Medium to long term: A national strategy

Developing a national strategy that plans the total number of training places needed by phase and subject, as well as being properly sensitive to regional variations, is a medium term rather than a short term fix. Before that can start we need to meet the objections of those in government who, in spite of what is happening currently, believe the market will, somehow or another, look after itself.

Inevitably, the acceptance and implementation of a national strategy in the medium term would begin to yield results in the long term objective we all share.

One word of caution

We need a healthy number of well-qualified teachers, with sufficient numbers to meet the needs of primary schools and the curriculum demands of the secondary sector. Unless and until we are close to that happy position, moving teachers from one area to another merely rotates the pain.

Qualified this summer? Still looking for a teaching job?

TeachNext conversion courses in mathematics (secondary) or coding and mathematics (primary) for newly-qualified primary teachers and PE teachers are being planned for the Spring Term 2016

If you qualified in July 2015 and are still seeking a post as a teacher, an eight-week conversion course (paid as an NQT) would enable you to apply for one of the vacancies from Summer Term 2016.

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Education plays a key role in the fight against isolation and loneliness among older citizens

By Ian Nash

Britain's fastest-growing lifelong learning organisation is proving to be a major player in the fight against increasing isolation and loneliness among people in older age. New regional studies of the age-profile of U3A members and their reasons for joining suggest that at least one in nine signs-up after often protracted periods of "chronic loneliness" following bereavement or social isolation as the family grows up and moves away.

Typical comments include: "I found the U3A to be a lifesaver" and "the U3A rescued me; it gave me reason to carry on". With increased life expectancy, people face longer periods in retirement and often have difficulty adjusting to new "freedoms" and reduced responsibility. But the chance to learn something new or explore something they love in greater depth gives back some meaning and purpose to life. While for many, the initial interest stems from the need for social activity, evidence shows clearly that it is the sustained but informal adult learning that nurtures their interest long-term.

Alan Harris, chairman of Flintshire U3A, joined after losing both his wife and daughter. "My wife died after a long battle with muscular dystrophy," he said. "Social life had dwindled to next to nothing as she had to be looked after on a continuous basis." A friend encouraged him to join and his life was transformed. "I found myself doing all sorts of things that would not have interested me a few years ago such as art appreciation and poetry."

Growth in U3A membership has been dramatic, rising from under 250,000 to around 400,000 in less than a decade. There are now 985 U3As nationally, expected to rise to 1,000 this autumn. Each U3A is autonomous and subject interest groups are created by the members. The range and style of studies reflects non-vocational college courses which have seen sharp decline under the Government's austerity cuts over the past six years.

Alan Harris reckons such learning provision is indispensable. "I'm 74 and I will never stop learning. I've been a lifelong reader but there was a long period when everything was subordinate to much more

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Ian Nash

immediate tasks. The U3A was really helpful, particularly when my daughter died. Acquaintances rallied round, I had networks of friends and people to learn with. It's good to have people to talk to in the same period of life as you."

Eighty-four-year-old Pearl Webster has become a published poet since retirement, running workshops and giving recitals in Lancashire. The death of her husband from pancreatic cancer had left her utterly bereft. "In grief we change personality because we think that's a time when we have a past but no future to look forward to," she says. "It was the U3A that made

me realise we can concentrate on the present.” Creative writing, jazz appreciation and musical theatre interest groups fuelled her drive to write.

Eighty-year-old Dave Davison became a family biographer, book-binder and publisher – all activities resulting from his involvement with the U3A. “It was in April 2013 when my wife died unexpectedly. She was suffering from osteoporosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, but this came so suddenly after going into hospital. We were real soul mates, married for 53 years and at the end of that, I was lost.” But the U3A put him back on course and now part of his reason for publishing is to tell the story of his beloved wife.

Several U3A chairmen pointed to the health benefits. One said: “Chronic isolation brings a notable decline in health and you see a big improvement soon after they join us.” It is a point raised constantly over the past two decades in reports from the OECD, the Centre for Wider Benefits of Learning at Birkbeck and the University College London Institute of Education and government papers.

A government research report in 2012 summarised the benefits of lifelong learning that could be measured. The five key benefits identified were: improved mental health and wellbeing, better physical health, active family and parenting support, greater civic participation and improved attitudes and behaviours. The report concluded that the largest impact was on health and well-being.

The impact on health among older people is particularly noticed, said Alan Tuckett, Professor of Education at the University of Wolverhampton and former director of the National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education. “A Derbyshire care home reported that following the introduction of classes, including exercise classes, there was a 50% drop in in-day medication.” Similarly, in a West Country home, saving totalled £100,000, with lifelong learning identified as the key to better health.

Professor Tuckett was not surprised by the U3A evidence. “The importance of learning in adult life was recognised in the government Foresight study in 2008, when it argued that learning was one of five key things to do each day to foster mental well-being. When I was a Principal in London it was apparent, too, that quite apart from the stimulus offered by affordable classes, they were a route for many to overcome isolation and loneliness.”

Pam Jones, national chairman of the U3A and Third Age Trust, said: “Retirement is not an end but a change of direction. Continuous learning not only assists people in preparing for this but it also helps bring greater fulfilment. Indeed, this is why the U3A was created and continues to grow.” (See the next article.)

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We reach the parts other services for the Third Age do not reach

By Pam Jones
National Chairman of the U3A

So much education these days is about getting a foot on the first rung of the training and skills ladder for a job or retraining after redundancy. It is easy to dismiss the idea of learning for its own sake as a dispensable luxury – something to be postponed until we have the time and money to pursue it. As a result, too often, people grow out of the habit or lose sight of its importance. Then, when they have the time in retirement, too many people dismiss it as no longer necessary or useful. It was against this all-too-prevalent negative culture around older age, more than 30 years ago, that the University of the Third Age was launched in the UK.

Today, we find a new or at least rapidly growing imperative for lifelong learning. The demographic shift to an older but healthier population increases the need to see the end of paid employment differently, as people face the prospect of decades in retirement. We see this most acutely when someone suffers bereavement or their families grow and leave home.

We estimate that at least one in nine people suffer periods of chronic loneliness before joining the U3A and we see how new opportunities for learning change their lives. The distinction between “useful” and “useless” learning has disappeared, if it ever really existed. The evidence coming through our regions, as trustees look closely at the changing pattern of membership, indicates just how important the informal learning opportunities we offer are to people in older age.

We are not a welfare organisation but what we do indirectly provides good welfare. Our interest groups are not only platforms for keeping our brains active but they provide social support. People soon get deeply involved in shaping their own learning and helping others to learn. Those who discover a way out of isolation through us soon become ambassadors, looking out for neighbours in need of help and who would benefit similarly.

That’s what U3A affords to people and friendships and companionship are the result. We are incredibly cheap so that people on low incomes can afford to belong. Everywhere I go, someone says to me

“We are incredibly cheap so that people on low incomes can afford to belong.”

‘U3A has been my saviour’. Indeed, there is also significant evidence of the positive impact such learning has on improving mental and physical health.

I get so frustrated when watching TV programmes on loneliness and “Mr Smith, aged 69”, who hasn't seen anyone for the last week. It is this way of thinking that

someone else is responsible. That is too often the way of our society; it needs to change and I am determined though the U3A to assist in that change.

Learning in retirement helps members determine their own course of life, which is good for morale and confidence as we get older. The benefits of U3A involvement are many. People are able to do things not available earlier in life, there is social interaction in groups whilst learning and members share skills and life experience. We work on the maxim that the learners teach and the teachers learn. All the evidence shows that this brings so much. It enhances an understanding of the world around us, improves our quality of life and boosts confidence and self-esteem. The sheer joy of discovery helps people put aside the aches and pains and helps our members achieve a more satisfying personal life.”



Pam Jones

OECD calls on Lithuania to step up efforts to boost youth employment

Lithuania needs to boost job creation and reduce labour costs to help more young people into work, according to a new OECD report. *Investing in Youth: Lithuania*, points out that despite the youth unemployment rate falling to 15.3 per cent in the third quarter of 2015, the figure is still higher than before the crisis when it was 10 per cent.

At the same time, only 28.6 per cent of young Lithuanians are employed, compared to an OECD average of 40 per cent. Mark Pearson, OECD Deputy Director of Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, said that with a rapidly ageing population and shrinking workforce, Lithuania needed to give young people the chance of a good job so that they could play their part in the country's future economic growth.

He added that as too many young people were still being left behind, more urgent comprehensive action would be needed. Mr Pearson explained that a key challenge was poor job quality as many young people had low-paid, informal jobs which risked unemployment and low benefits and few offered opportunities for training or career development.

To help more young people into work, the OECD recommends that Lithuania should:

- Raise unemployment benefits for young people to counterbalance planned reductions in severance pay.
- Consider a reduced minimum wage for young people to support job creation. To avoid this creating a rise in the number of low-pay jobs for young people, this should be combined with an increase in the statutory level of monthly non-taxable income.
- Strengthen public employment so that staff could provide more personalised support for young people, especially in rural areas.
- Revamp vocational education and apprenticeship. While current initiatives have showed promise, enrolment rates are low by international standards. Involving the private sector and increasing financial incentives for firms to hire apprentices would help.

London lags behind other world cities

London secondary school pupils are behind their peers in East Asian, European, Australian and North American cities and regions by the equivalent of about half a year of schooling. Children in Shanghai, the top performing city overall, are around 3 years ahead of their London peers in maths alone.

Only the top 10 per cent of London's 15-year-olds are able to match the maths skills of the average Shanghai pupil at that age. Researchers from the UCL Institute of Education compared the performance of 1,000 pupils across 42 London schools to their peers around the world. The researchers estimated pupils' scores using information collected in 2009 and 2012 from the Programme for International Student Assessment. London was consistently outperformed by Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong, Maastricht, Helsinki, Milan, the Australian states of Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, the Canadian provinces of Québec, Ontario and British Columbia, and the American states of Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Pupils in the Latvian city of Riga performed better than Londoners in maths and reading. Moscow and Reykjavik did better in maths, and Madrid scored higher in reading. Pupils in the rest of the UK scored slightly higher on science assessments, but they were no better or worse than Londoners in any other area. While 15-year-olds in London were no different from their peers around the world in their work ethic or perseverance in their studies, they were much more likely to take responsibility themselves if they did badly on a test, rather than blame their results on factors outside their control.

Designing a Teaching Excellence Framework

The Higher Education Policy Institute has published *Designing a Teaching Excellence Framework: Lessons from other sectors*, which explores the experience of ratings in other education and care markets. It also calls on the Government to heed the lessons from them in developing the Teaching Excellence Framework.

The report's author, Louisa Darian, who led the work on higher education at *Which?*, explained that a well-designed TEF had an important role to play in supporting students to make informed choices. But she added that to do so, institutions would need to apply for higher-level awards, and ratings would need to be based on rich evidence and available at subject-level. Ms Darian added that while moving to an Ofsted-style scheme would be difficult in higher education, Government and the sector should consider how to further integrate the TEF into the quality assurance system.

She also called on the Government to postpone the first year of the TEF to ensure that it delivered meaningful information to students. Nick Hillman, HEPI's Director, said that while Ministers wanted to see the best possible teaching and learning in higher education, assessing the quality was easier said than done as there was no agreed way of assessing what students learned. He added that although there were no off-the-shelf solutions available from other countries, it was possible to learn from the experience in other sectors. Mr Hillman explained that the ratings which had existed for many years for nurseries, schools and hospitals, would provide positive and negative lessons for the new TEF.

“Nick Hillman, HEPI’s Director, said that while Ministers wanted to see the best possible teaching and learning in higher education, assessing the quality was easier said than done as there was no agreed way of assessing what students learned.”

Professor Les Ebdon, Director of Fair Access to Higher Education welcomed the report, which drew on information and evidence from outside higher education to help policy-makers to design the Teaching Excellence Framework. But he added that the Government's higher education Green Paper had stressed the importance of considering fair access when designing the TEF. Professor Ebdon highlighted the need to ensure that the metrics in the TEF were broken down and reported by disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups. He added that the TEF should also recognise those institutions that could truly claim to be excellent because they welcomed and supported students from a range of backgrounds.

Professor Ebdon said that provided that those conditions were met the TEF would help to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds would get the most from their studies and were well prepared to

accrue the life-changing benefits higher education could offer. John Widdowson, President of the Association of Colleges, said it was important that the Framework should equally and fairly recognise all types of higher education, including that provided by colleges.

He pointed out that 159,000 people were studying HE in a college and many of them were adults who were fitting their course around work or family commitments. Mr Widdowson added that others studied part time to combine work and career with the demands of their course.

The Teaching Excellence Framework

The Teaching Excellence Framework: Assessing quality in Higher Education, House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee, Third Report of Session 2015/16, HC 572, published by the Stationery Office, 29 February 2016.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee acknowledges from its opening sentence that “the UK has a world-leading higher education sector” which is second only to the US in terms of the number of universities in the top global rankings. The Committee acknowledges that the UK has one of the best university systems in the world, but notes that it is an increasingly competitive market and it emphasizes the need to ensure that the UK’s good system is getting even better.

The Committee welcomed the provisional nature of the Government’s Green Paper, *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*, published in November 2015 and trusted “that this means Government is truly open to hearing how different elements of its proposals are viewed by the sector and by students”.

The Committee shared the general support for the principle of the Teaching Excellence Framework but recognised the legitimacy of concerns about the practical details of implementation, given the proposed pace of implementation. The Committee felt that the increasing competitiveness of this sector heightens the responsibility on Government to establish new mechanisms to measure properly the level of teaching quality. The report concluded that “the forthcoming technical consultation should therefore be an opportunity for Government to respond to the concerns raised in this inquiry, and elsewhere, with more detailed policy on assessing quality in higher education and a comprehensive road map for implementation”.

The Committee noted that changing student expectations and an increasingly competitive environment for both UK and international students were key challenges for the higher education sector. The Committee therefore welcomed and endorsed the Government’s focus on teaching quality. “We agree that a stronger incentive to focus on teaching quality via the Teaching Excellence Framework will help to ensure that higher education institutions meet student expectations and improve on their leading international position,” the report stated.

The report recommended that the Government consults on suitable metrics on widening participation, to be used by the Office for Fair Access as part of its process for approving access agreements with institutions, which the Committee felt were a pre-requisite for any increase in tuition fees. “We agree with the Government’s approach of properly testing and consulting on potential metrics. To this end, we recommend that Government includes in its further consultation on metrics: An assessment of the evidence that any proposed metric is linked to teaching quality; and An assessment of the potential unintended consequences which could arise from an institution seeking to optimise its score on each metric, with proposals on how these risks can best be mitigated.” It urged the university sector to “engage fully” with the technical consultation. The Committee recommended that the Government should provide further detail on the balance between qualitative and quantitative assessment as part of its forthcoming technical consultation and sought views on its proposals.

The report noted that universities were increasingly prioritising teaching excellence and were taking steps to improve teaching quality. The establishment of the National Student Survey “has provided a welcome source of feedback for students and universities alike and has no doubt sharpened the focus on teaching quality.” The Committee agreed that a “properly-working TEF can further incentivise the delivery of consistently high teaching quality and help to hold universities to account for teaching as well as research”. The Committee recommended that It should also be centred on the interests of the student, by assisting student choice rather than adding unhelpful complexity. “We welcome the Government’s consultative approach in producing a Green Paper before more detailed proposals are published. We urge the Government to set out in detail its response to the concerns that have been raised about the suitability of the proposed metrics.”

The Committee agreed with the Government that no university should be allowed to increase its tuition fees without being able to demonstrate that the quality of its teaching meets minimum standards.

Freedom of speech in higher education

Baroness Deech (CB) asked the Government what steps it was taking to ensure freedom of lawful speech at universities, in the light of recent disruptions to speeches. (House of Lords, oral question debate, 22 February 2016.) Baroness Evans of Bowes Park (Con), a Government Whip, said that universities had an unambiguous duty to ensure that legal and lawful views could be heard but, equally, could be robustly challenged and debated.

Baroness Deech urged the minister speak to the vice-chancellors at Universities UK to ensure that the law on freedom of speech was upheld. She also asked the minister what was causing the stifling of intellectual freedom in universities. Baroness Evans said that the Government had been concerned about the number of incidents that had taken place.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (UKIP) argued that while criticism and debate about religions should be part of freedom of speech at universities, the lawful line was crossed when adherents to those religions were insulted for their beliefs. Baroness Evans said that although students and academics had the right to protest peacefully, intimidation, harassment or the silencing of those they disagreed with had to be stopped.

The Bishop of Worcester (Ind) argued that intervening in such situations would be counterproductive. Baroness Evans said that the Government would support universities in making sure that legitimate, lawful debate could take place. Baroness Garden of Frogna (LDP) asked the minister what dialogue the Government had had with universities to support freedom of speech while implementing the guidance that university events should be cancelled unless the authorities were sure that the risk that views could draw people into terrorism could be fully mitigated. Baroness Evans pointed out that all universities had submitted the first self-assessment form following the introduction of the Prevent statutory duty in January, which would be followed in the spring by detailed assessments of their policies and procedures.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB) said that words such as “antisemitism” and “Islamophobia” and those relating to any other type of religious phobia should not be used as shields to stifle legitimate debate. Baroness Evans stressed that the Government wanted to support students and universities in ensuring that legitimate, lawful, debate and the challenging of ideas could continue to take place in universities.

Baroness O'Neill of Bengarve (CB) asked the minister what would be the most effective means by which university vice-chancellors and councils could alter the climate in which some people confused the passion of their own disagreement with a licence to silence. Baroness Evans pointed out that Louise Richardson, vice-chancellor of Oxford University, had said that students must learn to engage with ideas that they find objectionable and be more willing to debate with opponents to try to change their minds. She added that such statements from vice-chancellors would encourage students and stress the need to debate and argue about ideas.

Removing students from migration figures

Baroness Sharp of Guildford (LDP) asked the Government what consideration it had given to removing international students from the net migration figures by including them as non-immigrant admissions, as was the case in the United States. (House of Lords, question for short debate, 25 February 2016.)

She pointed out that the Office for National Statistics used the UN definition of “migrant”, which included all people who moved into the country for a period of 12 months or more, regardless of the purpose or permanence of their stay. Baroness Sharp added that on that basis, all students who came to

study in the UK for more than a year would be counted as immigrants and all those who left at the end of their studies would be counted as emigrants. She stressed that the universities were particularly unhappy with the regime of “credibility interviews” which had been instituted by the Home Office since 2012, whereby students, having applied for and having received their certificate of acceptance by the universities, then had to apply for a visa and were further interviewed by Home Office officials, often by Skype, to assess whether they were bona fide students.

Baroness Sharp said that the practice was far from a small, random sample as in 2014 125,000 credibility interviews had taken place and the total number of entrants had been 174,000. She added that there had also been a sizeable increase in the number of visa refusals. Baroness Sharp said that research by the UK Council for International Student Affairs had revealed that Home Office officials had been making judgments well beyond the agreed terms of such interviews, and they had often countered the university’s own assessment of academic potential on a seemingly random and inconsistent basis.

Because those who had conducted the interviews were not required to keep records of their reasons for turning down a visa there was no recourse on the judgements. Baroness Sharp stressed that the overall result, far from encouraging overseas applicants to apply to UK universities, was driving them into the arms of the UK’s competitors, the USA, Canada and Australia, all of which were seeking to increase applicants from abroad.

Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots (Con) said that the Government should resist calls to change the categorisation. He pointed out that in the year ending March 2015, 216,000 student visas had been issued, which had been roughly the same number as in the prior year. Also in that year, 73,000 applications to extend the student visa had been made and granted.

Baroness Bakewell (Lab) urged that Government to consider a post-study work visa. She added that there seemed to be a tension, in that the Home Office had planned to increase the amount of cash in the bank that foreign postgraduates must have before they were allowed into the country and insist that they must pass tougher language tests, but the Chancellor, George Osborne had shot down the suggestions. Baroness Brown of Cambridge (CB) said that the inclusion of overseas students in net migration figures, within a population that the Government wanted to reduce, while simultaneously targeting an increase in their numbers, was illogical. She urged the Government to consider not only taking overseas students out of the net migration figures, but to make it easier for companies, in particular SMEs, to recruit overseas graduates from UK universities by, for example, reducing or removing the minimum starting salary for a tier 2 visa, a restriction that did not exist in the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand.

Lord Holmes of Richmond (Con) argued that, to have a northern powerhouse, international students would be needed and he called on the Government to end the visa vapidty. Lord Holmes stressed that counsels of prudence were needed, not of prevention, and the brightest and the best should be warmly welcomed to come and study in Britain.

The Minister of State for the Home Office, Lord Bates (Con) said that although the number of overseas students going to Russell group universities was up by 39 per cent since 2010, there were differences in the figures when they were looked at country by country. He pointed out that the Universities Minister, James Brokenshire, had recently visited India to bust some of the myths that surrounded the welcome that awaited genuine students who had the relevant qualifications and had been offered places at the UK’s world-class universities. The minister stressed that there was no limit on the number of students who could attend genuine universities in the UK and there was no limit on the number of people who could switch from tier 4 visas to tier 2 graduate programmes. He added that there were also special programmes for PhD students and for post-doctoral study.

Lord Bates pointed out that post-study, students could continue to work and gain experience and they could continue on tier 5 with approved internships and training programmes. He said that 28,000 organisations had approval to sponsor tier 2 graduate employment opportunities and there was also the PhD entrepreneur route on tier 1. But the minister said that because people often came to the country to study and then stayed on, there was a discrepancy between the figure of 117,000 coming in and 40,000 leaving. He added that the Government needed to find out why the country had the 77,000 discrepancy and it also needed to understand the data.

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