
Education

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OECD on UK – could do better

The Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development published its annual *Education at a Glance* volume of statistics this week. While there were some areas in which the UK did well, for example by spending more on early years provision than any other country in the OECD, overall it was more a picture of too many areas in which Britain was around the OECD average. While there have been some advances over the last five years, other countries have advanced further and faster and have overtaken Britain.

At primary level the UK has among the largest class sizes in the OECD. Only three countries – Japan, South Korea and Turkey, all of which are in Asia – have larger classes. While spending as a percentage of GDP is above the OECD average, this is entirely because of higher levels of spending in the private sector. Without this, UK spending equals the OECD average. In terms of class size, the gap between the private and public sectors in the UK is the greatest in the OECD. Staff costs in the UK are low by international comparison, being the fourth lowest in the OECD. Claims that the UK spends too much on staffing are clearly wrong. In terms of pay, however, UK teachers do relatively well.

There has been a big increase across the OECD in the numbers going into higher education. While there has also been an increase in the UK, it has been more modest while other countries have shot past Britain. While the UK was well ahead of most countries in terms of HE participation in 2000, its position in 2005, the latest year covered by the report, is at 51% below the OECD average of 54%. Many countries now have two thirds of their young people going to university.

This expansion of higher education has not eroded the earning power of having a degree, nor has it depressed the pay of those with upper secondary qualifications. Only those who leave school with few if any qualifications are facing a bleak future. The financial advantages of a degree are greater in Britain than in other parts of the OECD. Here the advantage of a degree over A-levels is earnings 77 per cent higher.

Reaction

Steve Sinnott, general secretary of the NUT, welcomed the report which he said “rebutts the corrosive messages, from those determined to limit the numbers of youngsters going to university, that university expansion has led to a watering down in the value of qualifications...In this country the message from OECD is unequivocal. Raising the staying-on rate to 18 and expanding the number of university places is good for the country and good for young people. The UK’s investment in early years provides the bedrock for later achievement.” Noting the difference between the private and public sectors in Britain, Mr Sinnott added: “I look to the fulfilling of the Prime Minister’s commitment to match public with private spending on education. Levels of support for youngsters from deprived backgrounds must be raised. State school class sizes must be brought down to private school levels”. His assistant secretary, John Bangs, added that “strategically, investment in education pays off”.

Martin Johnson, acting deputy general secretary of the ATL, said: “We are pleased the OECD endorses the Government’s investment in highly skilled teachers and support staff as the best way to provide a good education system... It will be interesting to see whether the more searching analysis in the OECD’s PISA results, due out in December, will show if our highly centralised and micro-managed education system is actually leading to better results by pupils.”

Education at a Glance 2007 is reviewed at greater length in the next issue of *Education Journal*.

Unauthorised absence rise ‘due to inconsistent practice’

Attendance rates in secondary schools have improved overall since 2002, but unauthorised absence has not shown the same levels of improvement, according to Ofsted. Its report, *Attendance in Secondary Schools*, claimed that the rise in unauthorised absence was largely due to the different ways in which schools authorise absence. Some schools will mark a pupil who arrives late as absent if they don't think the reason given is good enough, while other schools will just mark them as late, claims the report. Practice for recording absence in schools is inconsistent because some schools accepted explanations from pupils and parents which would have been challenged in other schools. The report, based on a survey of 31 secondary schools and an analysis of inspection judgments on attendance in 2005/06, found a direct link between the quality of teaching and attendance levels. Secondary schools with high quality teaching and learning were found to have the highest levels of attendance.

Schools councils should be compulsory, claims research

All secondary schools should be legally obliged to create school councils, according to new research. Geoff Whitty, of the University of London Institute of Education, concluded that the Government should require all maintained secondary schools to have a school council, while primary schools should be “strongly encouraged” to have one. Other research, from Birmingham University, studied eight schools over three years and concluded that school councils should play a central role in helping create policy. In response, Schools Minister Andrew Adonis reiterated the Government's strong support for school councils, saying that they can lead to better behaviour and help young people understand their rights and responsibilities.

Kids' poor communication could cost Scotland £1 billion

More than 1,700 children who started primary school in Scotland this autumn may be at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) at 16 to 18, as a direct result of their communication support needs, according to children's communication charity I CAN. Its report, *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication: Scotland edition*, claims that this could cost the Scottish economy more than one billion pounds. It says that this cost is the equivalent of building 42 new schools at a cost of £29 million each, or employing 48,752 new teachers. In the UK an average 7% of the population are NEET, each individual costing £97,000 over their lifetime. In Scotland this figure rises to 14%.

Students gagging for a revolt over the end of free ESOL

Students and their lecturers across England have taken part in demonstrations over fears that the Government will end entitlement to free language classes for some categories of students. There are also concerns that some ESOL courses will disappear. In several English towns and cities, including London, Huddersfield and Stockton-on Tees, students will take part in activities highlighting the plight of students who will no longer qualify for free classes. Students from Huddersfield Technical College will attend free outdoor lessons while gagged. The events are part of a 'Save ESOL' campaign coordinated by UCU.

Govt. raises awareness of support for FE and HE students

Students who think they can't afford to access further and higher education are the target of a new government campaign to raise awareness of the financial support packages on offer. Sixteen and 17-year-olds across the country will meet with secretary of state for Innovation, Universities and Skills, John Denham, to voice their concerns, their aspirations for the future and what more needs to be done to overcome barriers to access. From September 2008, around one third of eligible students are expected to be entitled to a full Maintenance Grant of up to around £2,835. Around a further third are expected to qualify for part of the Maintenance Grant.

Scottish Executive launches final part of teaching resource

The latest section of a ground-breaking new learning resource has been 'switched on' by the cabinet secretary for lifelong learning, Fiona Hyslop. *The Journey to Excellence*, jointly developed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and Learning and Teaching Scotland, is a powerful digital resource that features what will be a growing library of examples of good practice from a range of schools and centres. It provides practical support for those involved in schools and early education centres, and features the voices of staff, children and senior leaders, and those who work in partnership with them.

Further education sector welcomes government reforms

Further education teachers have welcomed the Government's introduction of new FE workforce reforms. The regulations, led by Lifelong Learning UK, the Sector Skills Council for learning professionals, and the Department for Innovations, Universities and Skills, have introduced new qualifications and professional status for FE teachers across colleges and other LSC-funded providers. The reforms, which came into force at the beginning of September, also include a requirement for teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers and instructors to fulfil at least 30 hours of CPD each year, and a new leadership qualification (Principals' Qualifying Programme) for all new college principals.

Warning as one in eight pupil referral units 'inadqueuate'

One in eight of England's Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are inadequate, according to Ofsted. A survey in 2005/06 found that only around half of PRUs were found to be good or outstanding, but it found that many PRUs faced common problems, and identified examples of effective practice in the most successful units that could help other units overcome them. According to the report, the keys to success for PRUs are to set pupils high expectations, offer an interesting and relevant curriculum and focus on improving academic and personal development and confidence. It also found that a clear sense of purpose and a strong working relationship with the local authority were key features of success.

NCSL launches ground-breaking leadership web resource

A free online resource that brings together existing knowledge and best practice on *Every Child Matters* has been launched by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The content of the ECM Leadership Direct website includes practice and NCSL development work over the past three years. Users visiting the site will be introduced to an authoritative bank of knowledge, case studies, tools, stimulating think pieces and publications that can be taken away and used locally. The site, which will grow over the next few months, is currently home to 41 publications, 46 think pieces from experts in their field, 33 tools and activities, surveys and questionnaires, and 32 case studies. Visit www.ncsl.org.uk/ecmleadershipdirect

Memorial for Anne Jarvis at the Institute of Education

A memorial event to celebrate the life of Anne Jarvis was held this week at the London University Institute of Education. People from the worlds of education, local government and politics, including former Labour leader Lord Neil Kinnock, were present at the well-attended event to celebrate a lifetime of public service.

Prof Geoff Whitty, Director of the Institute, welcomed those attending. The actress Paula Wilcox, a friend of the family, read extracts from a book that students from St Anne's College, Oxford, had produced called *Isis idol*. Rosslyn Green, a former colleague, spoke about Anne as a teacher. Ajay Kumar, a former primary school pupil taught by Anne Jarvis spoke movingly of the effect on his life. She had instilled a love of France in him and while visiting the country years later he met his wife there. He had come from Australia for the event. Steve Sinnott, general secretary of the NUT, announced that the union had established the Fred and Anne Jarvis education award for campaigning on education.

EDUCATION JOURNAL

The current issue includes:

- Andrew Thomson, CEO of the Quality Improvement Agency, on quality improvement in further education
- Ian Nash writes about the hurried introduction of Diplomas
- George Low reports on the launch of a TUC report on academies
- The voice of young people. Jennie Harland of NFER writes about her research into the effectiveness of including young people in decision-making
- Reviews of a range of select committee reports from the House of Commons and the House of Lords
- A new book review section

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Document round-up

The Department of Health has published *Why Your Child's Weight Matters*. This booklet has been produced for parents. It has information on the National Child Measurement Programme, why maintaining a healthy weight is important, and the steps that parents can take to help their family develop a healthy lifestyle. Free from www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/index.htm

I CAN has published *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication: Scotland edition*. This report claims that more than 1,700 children who started primary school in Scotland this autumn may be at risk of becoming NEET, costing the Scottish economy over one billion pounds, as a direct result of their communication support needs. Download the report free from www.ican.org.uk

The Institute of Education has published *Real Decision making? School councils in action*. The report concludes that all maintained secondary schools should have a school council, while primary schools should be “strongly encouraged” to have one. For more information contact Helen Green at h.green@ioe.ac.uk

Ofsted has published *Attendance in Secondary Schools*. The report claims that attendance rates in secondary schools have improved overall since 2002, but unauthorised absence has not shown the same levels of improvement. Download the report free from www.ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted has also published *Information for Local Authority Customer Service Staff*. This briefing is designed to assist front line customer service staff in handling parents' enquiries about when and how parents can complain to Ofsted, the type of complaints that can be considered and the action parents can expect Ofsted to take in response to a complaint. Download free from www.ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted has also published *Pupil Referral Units: Establishing successful practice in pupil referral units and local authorities*. Although there is a wide variety of PRUs, they face similar barriers in providing children and young people with a good education. These may include inadequate accommodation, pupils of different ages with diverse needs arriving in an unplanned way, limited numbers of specialist staff to provide a broad curriculum and difficulties reintegrating pupils into mainstream schools. Download free from www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Sutton Trust has published *University Admissions by Individual Schools*. The report claims that admissions to England's leading universities are dominated by a small number of schools, most of which are fee-paying. Download free from www.suttontrust.com/reports/UniversityAdmissionsbySchool.pdf

Research round-up

Two journals came into our office this week. *Compare* (Routledge, Vol.37 No.4) contains the article ‘The Problem of Cultural Fit – What can we learn from the German Dual System?’ by Theodore Lewis of the University of Minnesota. This article uses the German Dual System as a case for examining issues surrounding the adaptation of borrowed models. It argues that these models have a greater chance of taking hold, if the conditions that forged them are understood, and if conditions of the receiving country are likewise internalised.

The *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* (Routledge, Vol.59 No.3) is a special issue entitled ‘Perspectives on Vocational Education and Training in Post-war England’. It contains the article ‘Behaviourism and Training: The programmed instruction movement in Britain, 1950-1975’, by John Field of Stirling University. The article examines the influence of behaviourism on vocational education and training in Britain at this time. It concludes by challenging simplistic dismissal of programmed instruction as mechanistic, utilitarian and reductionist.

Media Watch

The OECD report *Education at a Glance 2007* generated a lot of coverage in the serious press, though the papers were not agreed on what the main story was. Given the vast size of the report, with over 400 pages of statistics, this was hardly surprising. The *Guardian* concentrated on higher education, which was the main focus of the report. The *Independent* focused initially on statistics of primary class size, which are larger in the UK than in almost all other OECD countries. Only Brazil, Chile, Israel, Ireland, Japan, South Korea and Turkey are worse and of those only Ireland is in Europe. *The Times* chose secondary school exam statistics to lead on under the headline “Britain overtaken in world exam league tables”. The paper ran an editorial on the report, concluding that “the broad, albeit impressionistic, conclusions of this report are that education is a good investment both socially and economically but the UK does not enjoy a pre-eminent position among international peers when it comes to educational standards.”

On Sunday, the *Observer* revealed that a report from the Institute of Education had claimed that London faith schools were selecting proportionately more white, middle-class pupils. The Church of England responded fiercely to the accusation of “cherry picking” accusation although the research was based on the Government’s own data. The Institute warned that by selecting too many children from affluent families, the faith schools were contributing to racial and religious segregation. Rebecca Allen, from the Institute of Education, University of London, and Professor Anne West, Professor of Education Policy at the London School of Economics, studied the intake of faith schools across the capital using an extensive database compiled by the DCSF. Although the majority of faith schools were established to educate the poor, many had moved away from their original remit. The researchers found that religious secondary schools in London educated a smaller proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than non-religious schools and that their intakes were “significantly more affluent” than the neighbourhoods in which they were located.

Wednesday’s *Times* also revealed that a review by a university panel had recommended ending the admission of school-leavers to some of its colleges. Sir Colin Lucas, a former vice-chancellor, concluded that Oxford’s seven Christian private halls risked failing to provide a rounded learning experience in keeping with Oxford’s liberal ethos. The report highlighted concerns about the educational quality of life for young students at the university’s Anglican theological colleges. Halls were warned that they could lose their Oxford University Licences altogether if they taught a fundamentalist Biblical doctrine on sexual ethics and in other areas of theology.

Tuesday’s *Daily Mail* that 20 sets of twins were on the roll at a Cheshire school, including four pairs who joined this month. Staff at the Grange School in Hartford, near Northwich, said the situation made taking the register a little bit harder. But teachers had built up so much experience in tackling the challenge of teaching identical siblings that the school now specialised in looking after them. Roughly one in 28 of those attending the 1,140-pupil school was a twin. Fees at the school started at £6,060 per year for the junior school but there was a ten per cent discount for siblings. The school’s headmaster, Stephen Bennett, said that his staff always treated pupils as individuals and were not afraid to separate brothers and sisters if they felt it would benefit them. He said that some twins, especially when starting school, flourished better with the close support of their brother or sister. But others were keen to stop being one of a pair as soon as possible.

On Thursday *The Times* and the *Guardian* reported that a hundred schools, four-fifths from the private sector, accounted for nearly a third of all UK undergraduates starting at Oxford or Cambridge universities each year. A study published by the Sutton Trust highlighted how “a small cadre of elite ‘feeder’ schools” dominated Oxbridge admissions. Only two state comprehensives made the list, which looked at where one million teenagers went to university over five years. Thirty schools, including two state grammars and one comprehensive, accounted for nearly one in six Oxbridge entrants. Two hundred schools made up nearly half all Oxbridge entrants, while 3,500 other schools accounted for the remaining 52%.

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Editor: Michael Marshall

Editorial team: Demitri Coryton and Arabella Hargreaves.

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Devonia House, 4 Union Terrace, Crediton, Devon EX17 3DY.
Tel: 01363 774455. Fax: 01363 776592.
Email: education@educationpublishing.com. Web: www.educationpublishing.com

ADCS
Leading Children's Services

Humanities Building, Devas Street,
University of Manchester
Oxford Road, Manchester. M13 9PL
www.adcs.org.uk

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