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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 15 April 2016



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan was at pains to point out this week that her Dept's recent White Paper was a Paper about education rather than just about academies but nearly one month on from the Paper's launch, it's academies that continue to galvanise opinion. This week has seen a further rash of commentaries on the Paper, generally critical of some aspect and even some government backbenchers line up to offer their 'friendly fire.'

Three issues dominated speeches on Wednesday when the Opposition led a debate on the matter. First, and evident in Fiona Millar's article in the Guardian earlier this week, the lack of local accountability as schools become in her words, 'no different from branches of a supermarket.' Second, elected parents on governing boards: once the requirement for parent governors to be on academy boards has been dropped, will the role be abandoned as one academy chain has already? The PM defended the right of academies to choose but the blogs from Emma Knights and Conor Ryan cited below, present powerful arguments for exercising caution. And third, and perhaps the one issue that pretty much crossed Party lines: if it ain't broke, why try and fix it...if a school is performing well and everyone's happy why try and change it?

The Education Secretary justified the changes and other matters as part of a logical next phase of reform to extend excellence and indeed the government won the debate but the trenches remain where they are.

It hasn't all been about academies this week.

The Paper on graduate earnings from the Institute for Fiscal Studies has also attracted considerable attention and may yet prove to be a landmark moment in the growing industry of measuring returns let alone social mobility against learning outcomes. The significance of the Paper as Nick Hillman, Director of the HE Policy Institute put it, lay not so much in what was revealed but in the fact that it enabled new, more penetrating questions to be asked about the relationship between costs and returns and how these played out for different social groups. It'll not stop here as other parts of education will discover.

Finally FE, where the Minister has now issued guidance on transition grants, time-limited grants available for colleges where considerable re-structuring may be necessary following an area review. It's not a lot, grants of up to £100,000 for FE and £50,000 for Sixth Form Colleges, with colleges having to contribute 25% and it will be interesting to see how far a new breed of management consultants now appears.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Ofsted to penalize schools for 'gaming' league tables.' ([Monday](#))
- 'More than a third of new GCSEs and A' levels still not ready.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Wealthy students keep getting richer.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Tory backbenchers challenge compulsory academy plan.' ([Thursday](#))
- "Popular schools make parents face over subscription criteria.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- The Labour Party which led an Opposition Day debate on the recent Education White Paper
- The DfE which on the eve of an Opposition debate on the Education White Paper, issued a broadsheet [intended to dispel 10 myths about academies](#)
- The House of Commons Library which published a [briefing Paper on the recent schools White Paper](#)
- The government which has launched its consultation on introducing, from August 2017, a student loan funding system for [undergraduate and post-graduate nursing and allied professional provision](#)
- The think tank Centre Forum which published an [outline report on young people's mental health](#) pointing to wide variations across the country in the recognition, support, waiting time and treatment of mental health issues generally
- The HE and FE Ministers who have written to university and college leaders [urging them to encourage their students to vote in the EU referendum](#) in June

HE

- The Institute for Fiscal studies which further opened up debate about student mobility by publishing a Paper [comparing student backgrounds with courses studied and subsequent graduate wage returns](#)
- HEFCE which has been called on to manage the recently announced [Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund](#)
- Susan Lapworth, Director of Regulation and Assurance at HEFCE, who blogged about some of the changes indicated under [HEFCE's revised QA model](#)
- The Guardian which reported on the [ranking system for universities in India](#) which is being introduced for the first time

FE/Skills

- The BIS Dept which issued the latest guidance on [transition grants](#) for colleges involved in area reviews
- The 157 Group of Colleges which published a [skills manifesto ahead of the London Mayoral election](#) proposing a tiered model of skills provision with local regions leading L1/2 provision, London wide



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technical institutes leading L3,4,5 provision under the Mayor's direction and L6 remaining a national HE solution

- Truro and Penwith College which became [the first college to be graded outstanding](#) under Ofsted's new inspection framework which was introduced last autumn
- The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Education Funding Agency (EFA) which while not going for a full-blown merger is bringing together teams from the respective agencies to work on risk assessment and intervention
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) which [updated its guidance on funding regulations and rates](#) for 16-19 year olds
- The National Skills Academy for Food and Drink which is working with employers and the industry generally to develop [three new food industry degree apprenticeships](#)
- Maths in Education and Industry (MEI,) which published a discussion paper about what a [L2 Functional Skills in maths](#) should look like in terms of content, standards and assessment

Schools

- The education data specialists SchoolDash which [examined data on school performance](#) to see whether academies in their various forms helped raise school results or not (and as reported by the BBC concluded some did and some didn't)
- [Emma Knights](#), Chief Executive of the National Governors' Association (NGA,) the Sutton Trust's [Conor Ryan](#), and Guardian commentator [Fiona Millar](#), each of whom wrote interesting pieces this week about the impact of academisation on governance and ownership
- The think tank Centre Forum which published a helpful briefing on [financial issues facing schools](#)
- Ofqual which outlined the position on [the use of calculators in the new GCSE, AS and A levels](#)
- The Fair Education Alliance which issued a [Report Card on progress being made](#) against the targets it has set for raising standards and reducing inequality by 2022 and concluded that more needed to be done in 4 key areas: early years; teaching/learning; careers; and wellbeing
- The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) which examined a number of support programmes [intended to help KS4 students in danger of 'disengaging'](#) and highlighted some of the features that proved successful
- The Institution of Mechanical Engineers which called for more creative and problem-solving activities from primary level upwards as a way of [promoting engineering in schools and colleges](#)
- Wendy Jones from the charity National Numeracy who in an article for Prospect magazine, called for the introduction of a [more practical maths qualification at GCSE](#) alongside the more traditional 'academic' version

Tweet(s) of the week

- "The room that an academic walks into shapes the way they teach." [@LizbarnesStaffs](#)
- "Spelling of 'headteacher' is a minefield. Or, as the DfE put it 'a potential school site.'" [@xtophercook](#)



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- “A type of education nimby-ism is appearing in some Tory backbenchers. Academies are great...but not for our great local primaries.” [@seanjcoughlan](#)
- “Rankings where you come top are loved by the marketing dept. But you’ll learn more from the ones where you come lower.” [@QAAtweets](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- **“Parent governors:”** Are they being scrapped under academisation or not? The Prime Minister was challenged on this, MPs raised concerns about it and leading commentators took to the blogspace to argue the case. Apparently it’s being left to Academies to determine

Quote(s) of the week

- **“Only one of the eight chapters is concerned with academies”** - The Education Secretary reminds critics that there’s more to the recent White Paper than just academisation
- **“The current fad of isolating leadership as a stand-alone accomplishment is likely to have a damaging effect on leadership”** - Frank Furedi worries about the modern ‘fetish’ with school leadership
- **“We found that despite the gap generally closing over time at all key stages, for the most disadvantaged secondary pupils, the gap is actually widening”** - Natalie Perera, head of research at Centre Forum on one of the key messages that emerged from the think tank’s recent education report
- **“So while the exam board guidelines are not ideal, they are not bonkers, and may help to keep the drama GCSE alive”** - Guardian theatre commentator Lyn Gardner enters the debate about the removal by two exam boards of compulsory live theatre attendance in their GCSE drama specs
- **“Your students have bright futures ahead of them and they should have their say in this crucial decision”** - Ministers encourage university and college leaders to get their students to vote in the EU referendum
- **“What the internet does is rob children and teenagers of five minutes to think things through”** - The government’s mental health tsar on the immediacy of sexting and the dangers this can bring
- **“I’m terrible at maths...very bad at it”** - Prince William makes an admission to school children in India

Number(s) of the week

- £8,000 and £5,300. The average gap in income between higher and lower- income background male and female graduates ten years after graduating according to research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 6.5%. The drop in the number of people applying for university teacher-training programmes in 2015/16 according to latest UCAS figures
- £50,000-£100,000. What the government is making available in the form of transition grants for colleges having to undertake significant changes following an area review
- 100,419. The number of signatures on the Petition to include creative arts subjects in the Ebacc which at over 100,000 makes it eligible for a debate in Parliament



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- 2.9m. The number of young people (16-25 year olds) who have taken up volunteering over the last year (up 2%) according to latest figures
- 3. The number of children on average per classroom experiencing a mental health problem according to research from the think tank Centre Forum
- 26%. The number of people in a survey by National Numeracy able or willing to answer a question that required some numeracy skills on the amount of sugar in a chocolate bar. The question is [here](#)

What to look out for next week

- All Party Parliamentary Group for the teaching profession meeting (Monday)