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Policy Tracker – Keeping track of what happened in the world of education in April 2016



Main talking points

Some significant reports this month on school performance, mental health, GCSEs, young people and skills and graduate earnings among others but the main talking point this month has been the problems bubbling around the DfE over its accounts, academy plans and primary assessment arrangements

Key headlines from the month

- Reception assessments. Put on hold following issues raised in comparability studies
- Phonics. New research finds it can help disadvantaged children in early stages
- KS1 tests. Grammar test pulled after online leak
- Primary places. Concerns about regional variation as places for 2016 announced
- National Reference Test. Statutory Order published
- Languages. Still proving challenging according to latest survey
- EBacc. Petition to include creative subjects tops 100,000 signatures
- GCSE grading. Ofqual consults on higher grades and application to remaining GCSEs
- Qualification regulation. Ofqual highlights 3 goals in its latest Corporate Plan
- White Paper. Opposition MPs lead Westminster debate
- School funding. Institute for Fiscal Studies indicates 7% cut in per pupil spending by 2019/20
- School leadership. Plans emerge for a new Institute at the University of Bucks
- Regional Schools Commissioners. Further clarification on roles and KPIs promised
- 16-19 Study Programmes. Education Funding Agency reports on 2013/14 delivery patterns
- 2018 performance tables. Listing of recognized professional and technical qualifications published
- Apprenticeship levy. Latest guidance issued
- Degree Apprenticeships. HEFCE given the task of managing the new Development Fund
- FE. Guidance issued on transition grants to support post area review re-structuring
- Teacher training applications. UCAS reports drop of 6.5% in current applications
- Oxford. Lady Margaret Hall announces new Foundation Year pilot scheme
- Graduates. Important new data on earnings potential and issues published by IFS
- Students. Ministers write to universities and colleges encouraging students to vote

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Reports/Publications of the month (in order of publication)

- **Routes into Work-It's alright for some.** The AELP and Pearson report on barriers facing young people trying to progress into further training or work and call for a more coordinated approach
- **Corporate Plan 2016-19.** Ofqual sets out its latest Corporate Plan with an emphasis on qualification regulation, standards maintenance and resource management
- **Education in England: Annual Report 2016.** The think tank Centre Forum publishes the first of what is intended to be an annual health check on progress towards more aspirational standards
- **Working Futures 2014-2024.** The UK Commission on Employment and Skills helps weigh up the changing labour market and latest employment trends
- **Reception baseline comparability study.** The DfE commissioned study concludes that the 3 proposed models are not comparable enough to be used for reception assessments this year
- **Overlooked and left behind.** The House of Lords Social Mobility Committee reports on the challenges facing many young people not going to university but hoping to progress into work
- **Children and Young People's Mental Health.** The think tank Centre Forum publishes a second major report, this time highlighting the problems facing young people seeking mental health support
- **Skills for Work, Skills for London.** The 157 College Group offers its thoughts on the provision for skills training in London ahead of the London Mayoral election
- **Report Card 2015.** The Fair Education Alliance publishes a progress report on how well the English education system is doing against its 2014/15 listed attainment targets and finds only patchy progress
- **What and where you study matter for graduate earnings' but so does parents' income.** The title of this research briefing from the Institute for Fiscal Studies pretty much says it all
- **Timelines for schools and colleges.** The DfE publishes the latest listings of key notices for schools and colleges of what's coming up in the coming months
- **Long-run trends in school spending in England.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies examines the figures and finds considerable regional variation and gradual belt tightening all round
- **Caught out.** The Sutton Trust publishes a report compiled by Education Datalab showing how some over – subscribed primary schools end up applying a range of selection criteria
- **Lifelong Learning.** The Institute of Directors reports on an education system struggling to come to terms with the new age of technology and the different skill sets required
- **Language Trends 2015/16.** The latest survey from the British Council and Education Development Trust finds language teaching in England continuing to face challenges in areas like staffing, exams
- **The role of Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs.)** The government issues its response to the Education Committee's inquiry into RSCs promising that further clarification on roles will follow
- **DfE Consolidated annual report and accounts.** The DfE publishes its accounts for 2014/15 but falls foul again of NAO scrutiny over financial management and academy accounting procedures
- **English devolution deals.** The National Audit Office offers an interesting overview of the current policy and raises questions about accountability, transfer of power to mayors and overall impact

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- **Making a success of employer sponsored education.** The HE Policy Institute argues that employer sponsored degrees represent good value for money and should be given stronger billing
- **The Local Impact of College Based HE.** Research commissioned by the Education and Training Foundation supports the importance of some local HE in FE provision
- **What causes variability in school-level GCSE results year-on-year?** Ofqual investigates the issues and finds centre type and entry stability as potential factors
- **Setting the grade standards.** Ofqual consults on the approach to be taken for the remaining GCSEs and the adoption of a more 'tailored' approach for awarding grades 8 and 9 overall

Speeches of the month

- **Sir Michael Wilshaw's 14 April speech to the Fair Education Alliance** highlights the importance of tackling education inequality and praises the Alliance for its work in trying to tackle it
- **Nicky Morgan's 20 April Academies Show speech** offers a robust defence of the academisation programme but acknowledges that there are still issues to be resolved

Quotes of the month

- "It is not the case that every academy performs better than every LA school; but the academy system makes it easier to put in place those factors of better teaching, leadership, curriculums and accountability that incontrovertibly drive up standards" – the DfE fact sheet on academies
- "A young person considering their options for further education or employment is presented with gobbledygook" – The Chair of the Lords Committee on her report on young people
- "The basic structure of the UK education system dates from the mid-19th century and has changed little since" – the Institute of Directors bristles at an education system that has failed to adapt
- "The government's approach to English devolution still has an air of charting undiscovered territory" The National Audit Office runs the runes over the government's devolution policy
- "The median waiting time for all providers was one month for a first appointment and two months until start of treatment" – The think tank Centre Forum highlights how long young people with mental health issues have to wait to be seen
- "It is hard to avoid saying 'we told you so'" – head teachers react to the dropping of reception baseline assessments
- "Clearly a regrettable incident" – The Schools Minister on the leaking of the KS1 test paper

Word or phrase of the month

- 'Adverse opinion' – what the DfE faced over its accounting reports and other policies this month

Steve Besley

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