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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 29 January 2016



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a nearly 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

A lot of numbers have been flying around this week, largely it has to be said around skills training and funding. In no particular order, these are some of the key ones to note:

- £1.5bn. Not a new figure but the annual figure for adult skills training pretty much for the next four years and confirmed in the package of documents on 2016/17 funding rates and arrangements by the Skills Funding Agency this week. It's an important budget as it covers non-apprenticeship activity, so English and maths, community learning and so on and significantly will be transitioned over time to locally planned and commissioned activity under devolution deals. The SFA have produced an accompanying Paper on this budget and it's worth reading
- 2.3%. That's the minimum number of apprentices the government is expecting large public sector employers (250 employees or more) in England to recruit each year in future. Some school chains could come in scope. The government issued consultation on the target this week and intends to amend legislation enabling the Secretary of State to set targets and employers to report on progress
- 48%. That's the number of 16-34 yr olds in the UK with low levels (below L2) basic skills. Again this is not a new figure but one repeated in the OECD's latest UK adult skills survey this week, and given the average figure for other OECD countries is 29.8%, highlights the importance of strengthening this provision at school/college level. The OECD suggest HE funding could be diverted to support this
- 209,400. That's the number of job vacancies last year caused by a skills deficit of some sort and up from 146,200 in the last survey in 2013. The figures are in the latest Employer Skills Survey from the UKCES, suggest that some sectors like Construction (who also issued a skills shortage warning this week) and Finance are especially suffering and confirm concerns that skill shortages could limit growth
- 26%. That's the number of English students who secured a place in UK higher ed last year with a BTEC, up from 24.9% the year before and from 14% in 2008 when the increase became evident. A levels still provide the most popular route with 63% of 18 yr olds applying with the standard 3 A level package but as the accompanying UCAS report indicates, this diversity of learning is presenting new challenges

Top headlines this week

- 'State schools must drop outdated snobbery to apprenticeships, says Nicky Morgan.' (**Monday**)
- 'English schools struggling to recruit headteachers, research finds.' (**Tuesday**)
- 'Become an apprentice. If it's good enough for Dickens...!' (**Wednesday**)
- 'Students increasingly admitted to university without three A' levels.' (**Thursday**)
- 'Divert more university students into further education, report says.' (**Friday**)



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People/organisations in the news this week

- The HE Minister who delivered the annual **Campaign for Science and Engineering (CASE) lecture** and pledged continued government support for science and research along with a new partnership with the Wellcome Trust and additional money to attract the next generation of scientists and engineers
- The Education Secretary who is reported to be considering legislation to make sure that schools include **technical and apprenticeship routes** when providing career advice to young people
- Schools Minister Nick Gibb who highlighted the importance of school leadership and what the government was doing to support it in a **speech** to The Key organisation
- BIS who announced the **closure** of its Sheffield office by 2018
- UCAS who published a **report** looking into different Progression Pathways into UK higher education and found an increasing diversity of routes, particularly BTECs
- The HE Commission who published a **report** into the impact of data and analytics on the HE sector and in particular on the student learning experience and came up with a number of recommendations
- The Sutton Trust who published a **commissioned report** comparing and contrasting the different perceptions by school teachers and university admissions tutors about what constitutes a good personal statement and calling for clearer criteria and formats as a result
- The Skills Funding Agency who published the latest set of **funding rules, rates and guidance** for 2016/17
- The House of Commons Library who published a **Briefing Paper** on the post-16 area reviews of education and training
- The National Union of Students (NUS) who have launched an #FEunplugged campaign to prevent any **loss of student places** under the area review plans
- The government who have launched a **consultation** on setting apprenticeship recruitment targets for larger public sector bodies
- Nadhim Zahawi MP, the Prime Minister's adviser on apprenticeships, who teamed up with the Primary Futures programme to help launch a scheme to raise awareness **in primary schools about apprenticeships**
- The Times (paywall) who published a useful pullout **guide to elite apprenticeships** in its Wednesday edition
- The Construction Industry Training Board whose latest **skills report for 2016-2020 forecast** a significant growth in apprenticeships and other skilled trades to help cope with some big infrastructure projects being planned
- The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) who published its latest **Employer Skills Survey** based on findings from 2015, covering the findings from 91,000 employers and pointing to a significant increase in skills shortage vacancies in some sectors and under-utilisation of some staff skills
- The OECD whose latest **report on adult skills in England** once again highlighted low levels of basic skills among young people when compared not only with competitor countries but also with older adults in England and who recommended a big push on 16-19 basic skills training
- The Economist magazine who reported on **youth unemployment in 2016** and the changing face of the labour market plus future skill needs for young entrepreneurs trying to make it



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- The Future Leaders Trust who published a collection of **'think pieces'** from leading commentators intended to challenge current perceptions of school leadership and encourage more to take up the mantle
- The DfE who ahead of a proposed consultation, outlined some principles to help make the **school admissions process** more open and transparent
- Ofqual who issued an **updated listing** of new GCSEs, AS levels and A levels due to be taught from Sept 2016
- Ofsted whose latest **monthly commentary** focused on the issue of short inspections and how well or not these were working
- Michelle Meadows, Executive Director at Ofqual, who **blogged** about some of the issues involved in choosing an exam board
- Sir Michael Wilshaw who published a **statement** setting out Ofsted's position on the wearing of full veils in schools
- Malcolm Trobe who has taken over as **interim general secretary** of the ASCL
- The UCL Institute of Education who formally launched its latest Centre to support **Post-14 Education and Work**
- The thinktank Demos who published the **results** of a two-year pilot into what they called 'co-production' in schools or encouraging students and teachers to work together to tackle disengagement, concluding that giving students a sense of ownership can help in certain cases
- The House of Commons Library who published an updated **Briefing Paper** spelling out the latest changes to the Childcare Bill 2015 as it reached its final stage before becoming law

Tweet(s) of the week

- *"A Downing Street spokesman said neither David Cameron nor his wife Samatha had ever done the school run in their pyjamas."* @GregHurstTimes
- *"Tablets aren't the cure. There's no app for good teaching."* @josepicardoSHS
- *"80% of feedback students gets is from other students and 80% of that is wrong."* @ChrisSullivanNZ
- *"Apprenticeships embody one simple but powerful idea - opportunity."* @NickBoles MP
- *"Headteachers on the frontline: You get to July and think –it's worth it."* @alicewoolley1
- *"In last week's performance tables Rugby School scored 0% for GCSEs. So did Eton College. Weird, huh?"* @GoodSchoolsUK

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- *"Esteem excellence."* The new alternative to parity of esteem in learning

Quote(s) of the week

- *"We want to level the playing field – making sure they are aware of all the options open to them."* The Education Secretary considers legislation to ensure that young people are made aware of all options, vocational as well as academic as they consider future career choices



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- *“It (the Green Paper) fails to demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of our universities and the reasons for the sector’s international standing.”* The Times Higher reports on the response from Cambridge University to the government’s proposed higher education reforms
- *“If the English education system were to be designed from scratch on a blank sheet of paper, it would be unlikely to include an awkward programmatic and institutional point at 16.”* The OECD on not starting from here in redesigning the English education system
- *“It doesn’t mean real terms protection per pupil and it doesn’t mean protection for all elements of school funding.”* A DfE official on some of the realities of school funding (as reported by the TES)
- *“Why is it that droves of Chinese head teachers visit every year to look at our approaches to creativity in education?”* The Headteachers’ Roundtable Group highlights the dangers of squeezing out technical and creative education as it responds to the government’s EBacc plans
- *“I think it’s a sin to go into a classroom and tell another teacher how to teach. Because all you do is tell them how to teach like you.”* Professor John Hattie adds to the pantheon at this week’s Visible Learning World Conference
- *“We are trying to raise standards and get better outcomes for the children and we noticed a lot of the parents are turning up to school as well as meetings and assemblies wearing pyjamas.”* A headteacher issues a plea to parents about suitable dress codes

Number(s) of the week

- 9m. the estimated number of working age adults in England with low levels of basic skills according to the OECD
- 8m. How international students there could be globally by 2025 according to an article in The Economist
- 2m. The number of employees whose skills are not being fully utilized in the workplace according to the latest survey by UKCES
- 97,000. The number of apprenticeship starts the public sector will be expected to deliver each year to help meet the 3m target by 2020
- 26%. The number of English students who secured a place at UK universities in 2015 with a BTEC according to UCAS stats
- 27. The number of colleges now in the 157 Group with Cardiff and Vale College being the latest to join
- 4,000. How many jobs could be created in the construction industry for each of the next five years according to the CITB
- 1,000. How many more headteachers are likely to be needed over the next five years according to a report from the Future Leaders Trust

What to look out for next week

- Questions to BIS Ministers (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on ‘looked after’ children (Wednesday)
- Final LEACAN Conference (Thursday)
- Lords debate on the EBacc (Thursday)