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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 18 March 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

National Apprenticeship Week, the latest Budget, a new Education White Paper, a new Strategy Paper for the DfE, a cupboard full of reports and speeches...it's been some week for education leaving many relieved perhaps that the Easter break falls early this year allowing some time to take stock.

The week started in what is fast becoming a familiar Monday morning routine with the Prime Minister's latest announcement, this time on the ubiquitous Life Chances Strategy where youth mentoring and savings schemes were the key messages. At the same time, Ministers and MPs were fanning out across the country to lend their support behind the latest annual National Apprenticeship Week, a skills fest given added piquancy this time by the government's prioritising of apprenticeships as a major factor in its economic recovery plans with a range of mechanisms and targets to boot. Two days later, the Chancellor stepped up to announce the latest Budget proposals with education featuring in two of his five core themes and the day after the Education Secretary weighed in with a new Education White Paper, 124 pages and accompanied by a Dept Strategy Paper setting out how the Dept was going to deliver many of the proposals.

A full week then all accompanied by some useful commentary and some excellent summaries on the usual websites but perhaps more pointedly at the end of the week, what does it all mean, has there been a significant shift in policy terms, is the world a better place? Here's three initial thoughts.

First, despite all the other things going on, local elections, a referendum and so on, education remains a big priority for this government. Major announcements are being made now not just by the Education Secretary but by the PM and Chancellor who see education as a conduit into middle England.

That said, and secondly, the provision of education is changing rapidly, the implication of small state is greater institutional management. The White Paper is the manifestation of this; *"a school-led system, which rewards innovation, spreads excellence and is intolerant of failure,"* as the Education Secretary put it in her letter to Directors of Children's Services. The challenge will be whether this can release new energy and innovation into schools, especially for a profession feeling beleaguered.

Third, little of this will be of any avail if we don't ensure that young people gain the right skills and knowledge for the future. It was noticeable that the key theme in the Budget and in the PM's Life Chances Strategy was future generations: *"we choose to put the next generation first."* But, and here's just one reaction to the Budget: *"adult skills is still the Cinderella sector."* In fact one of the strong messages coming out of surveys taken for National Apprenticeship Week is that skills training is still seen as the poor relation. The challenge is whether a devolved skills system aligned to local need can help overcome this.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Minimum wage for apprentices to rise by 10p an hour.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Sixth form college teachers walk out.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Academies plan and longer school day.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'George Osborne announces the end of the school bell.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Exam appeals overhaul could harm students' prospects, leading heads claim.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- The Prime Minister who announced further developments under the [government's Life Chances strategy](#) including funding for a national mentoring scheme, an increase in the National Minimum Wage and a new Help to Save scheme, all at the start of the week
- The Chancellor of the Exchequer who presented his [eighth Budget](#) with a number of important announcements for education
- The Business Secretary who helped launch this year's [National Apprenticeship Week with a speech](#) at the Shard in London
- The Education Secretary who published a new [education White Paper](#) with a number of proposals intended to speed up the creation of a more autonomous school system than can spread excellence
- The DfE which published its [departmental vision and strategy for 2015-2020](#) built around three goals, five principles and twelve priorities
- Sally Collier who was grilled by the Education Committee prior to her [proposed appointment as Chief Regulator of Ofqual](#)
- The Bank of England whose latest Quarterly Bulletin reported on [how wage returns had changed](#) with a drop in some cases for the graduate premium
- '*Can I borrow you for a sec?*' Apparently the [most overused and equally most irritating work phrase](#) according to research from recruitment consultants Reed ('*Keep me in the loop*' and '*win-win*,' were also in the top ten)

HE

- Alternative providers, PhD loans and lifetime learning, all of which were included in this year's [Budget](#)
- Universities UK which published a [report on Degree Apprenticeships](#) as part of National Apprenticeship Week, highlighting how important a form of provision these could be for many universities but making a number of recommendations on working together, sharing best practice and resources
- HEFE which confirmed the [allocation of research and capital funds](#) for 2016/17 following the recent Grant Letter



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- Scotland which is likely to gain its own [Commissioner for Fair Access](#) following a report into widening access chaired by Dame Ruth Silver
- Loughborough, Harper Adams and Sheffield, the [top three universities in the UK for student experience](#) in the Times Higher's latest rankings
- The taskforce looking at harassment and hate crime issues in HE which [reported on progress](#) following its latest meeting
- The Economist which published a comment piece on the [lifting of the numbers cap in higher ed](#) suggesting that not all universities may benefit and that how the market re-aligns may not be straightforward

FE/Skills

- The Chancellor who announced a [10% apprenticeship levy top-up](#) from next April in this week's Budget Statement
- The Skills Funding Agency which published [new research about the importance of apprenticeships](#) to help mark the start of National Apprenticeship Week
- The Guardian which also marked the start of National Apprenticeship Week, in their case with an opinion piece puncturing [five of the top myths about apprenticeships](#)
- The Young Women's Trust which published data indicating that some apprenticeships were [treating young women unfairly](#) by channeling them into lower-paid occupations
- The Local Government Association which expressed [concern about the cost and impact](#) of not just paying the apprenticeship levy but having to meet apprenticeship recruitment targets as well
- Ofsted and Ofqual both of whom addressed FE Week's Annual Apprenticeship Conference, one on [quality of provision](#) and the other on the [quality of standards](#)
- The Skills Funding Agency which published the latest [employer and learner satisfaction data](#) on training provided showing a 70%+ happy rating on most counts
- Impetus-PEF, the Private Equity Foundation that works with charities to help support disadvantaged young people, which published a report showing that despite [retaking English and maths](#), many 16-19 yr olds, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, fail to improve their performance

Schools

- The Chancellor who included the full academisation of the school system, a new strategy for some Northern schools, some extra funding for transition to the new funding formula and a review of post-16 maths in his [Budget announcements](#)
- The government's [latest education White Paper](#) which will see among other things a new accreditation system for teachers, full academisation of the school system, performance tables for MATs, the removal of a separate inspection grade for the quality of teaching and a new portal for parents to access school information
- The Education Select Committee which announced a new [inquiry into Multi-Academy Trusts \(MATs\)](#)
- Toby Greany and Melanie Ehren of UCL's IoE who blogged about what [lessons we could learn from Holland](#) on the adoption of mass academisation



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- Ofqual which announced it would undertake further [research into the new A' level maths](#) sample assessment materials as part of the preparation for its first teaching from Sept 2017
- Ofsted which issued its [latest update on school inspections](#) with information and inspection guidance on Key Stage 2 assessment, Key Stage 4 floor standards and SEND
- The RSA which argued for a more [innovative approach to school system reform](#) calling in particular for a new kind of creative leadership, in a report published jointly with the Innovation Unit

Tweet(s) of the week

- *“Wonder what the staffroom reaction is to the news (via David Laws) that the PM thought Gove had gone a bit nuts when he was ed sec.”* @MrMichaelShaw
- *“White Paper. Academy status not a magic wand admits Nicky Morgan.”* @Schools Week
- *“Is a child’s full potential really only measured in punctuation marks?”* @teshelen
- *“1 billion people will start work in the next decade-only 40% in jobs that now exist.”* @EconBizFin

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- *“Goldthorpe class schema.”* A socio-economic classification system, widely used in debates on social mobility and devised over 30 years ago by the English sociologist Dr John Goldthorpe, who argued in a Lecture this week that things weren’t getting much better

Quote(s) of the week

- *“When you’re doing it, it’s hell, and after you’ve done it, you wish you’d done more of it.”* Former Prime Minister Tony Blair on how hard it can be reforming education, in case of any doubts
- *“But it is really nothing to be afraid of.”* The Business Secretary attempts to calm fears about the apprenticeship levy
- *“We must also keep a wary eye on apprenticeship completions.”* Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden highlights some issues to keep an eye on in the dash for apprenticeship growth
- *“5 year old children are consuming their body weight in sugar every year.”* The Chancellor explains the thinking behind the new sugar levy
- *“Basically the UK has a curriculum that is a mile wide and an inch deep.”* The OECD’s Andreas Schleicher resorts to traditional forms of measurement when discussing maths teaching in the UK
- *“We want to examine the role and governance of MATs and ensure we have a system which ensures these academy chains deliver excellent performance while being properly held to account.”* The Education Committee announces a new inquiry into Multi-Academy Trusts
- *“This is the burning platform approach to change management.”* The NAHT’s gen-sec Russell Hobby reflects on the latest spread of the academy movement



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Number(s) of the week

- 7. The number of leading companies (including Starbucks and Fortnum and Mason) who committed to the apprenticeship cause at the start of this year's National Apprenticeship Week
- 29%. The number of young people in a survey of 16-18 year olds by Prudential who said that information about apprenticeships in their school or college was poor or very poor (compared to 6% who thought the same about the info they received about higher education)
- 33%. How many people are disappointed with their career progression according to a survey by CIPD
- £4.00 an hour. How much the minimum wage for 16/17 year olds will be from this October, up from £3.87 currently
- £700m. How much Labour claim it'll cost to convert all schools to Academies
- £520m. How much the sugar levy is expected to raise in its first year much of which is intended to be passed on to schools to help them encourage healthy lifestyles for their pupils
- £25,000. The value of new loans for Masters and Doctorate courses which will come in from 2018/19 and which were announced in the Budget

What to look out for next week

- 'Building Character' National Conference (Monday)
- Education and Skills sub - committee session on careers (Monday)
- BIS Committee witness session on the Digital Economy (Tuesday)
- APPG Meeting on Social Mobility and Access to the Professions (Tuesday)
- Facebook Q/A with the Chair of the Education Committee (Thursday)
- Parliament in recess (Friday until April 11)