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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 25 November 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

If last week was all about FE and skills, this week it's been the turn of the economy to take centre stage where the latest Autumn Statement has provided the main talking point.

Five points stand out.

First, the tone for this year's Statement was noticeably different; monotonous to some, low key to others. So no rabbits out of hats, no great listing of glory projects, instead very much spreadsheet accounting and stark pragmatism, very much in the style of the current government. The Chancellor even had to step out of script at one point and remind listeners that what he'd said was good news in case they weren't too sure.

Second, in the immortal words of Irving Berlin, there may be trouble ahead, for the economy at least, so what the Chancellor needed to do was to get the economy in good condition, match fit as he put it for the future. But the problem is that no one knows for sure what the future holds. The Chancellor ran through the usual listing of economic indicators for the future, some good, some bad, some controversial but it's proving difficult to plot with certainty at this stage.

Third, when it came to education and skills there wasn't a great deal to get excited about and teachers' leaders have been expressing their disappointment. Some extra capital funding @ £50m a year from 2017/18, has been found to support any expansion of grammar schools, £1.8bn for LEP activity and an annual £2bn by 2020 for R and D but that's about it, leaving some to ask 'was that it?'

Fourth and a follow-on, this was a Statement as much for the future as the present, hence the emphasis on infrastructure, innovation and productivity. And talking of the future, the Chancellor gave some broad hints that some difficult issues will need to be tackled in the not too distant future: "we will need to ensure we tackle the challenges of rising longevity and fiscal sustainability." If we thought the last Spending Review was tough in other words, wait till you see the next one.

And fifth and widely reported, the government is moving to a different budget planning cycle: Autumn Budgets with Spring Statements, simpler and less disruptive is the argument.

All of which leaves space for just one other final comment this week which comes in the form of a letter to The Times, spotted by the TE's editor among others. With the announcement of some high-profile professionals considering switching career into teaching, it's suitably apt: "Sir, I'm 62 and have been a teacher all my life. Does anyone know of a new scheme where I may get a glamorous job in the City?"



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Top headlines this week

- ‘School budgets beyond breaking point, says heads union.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Universities and NUS plan boycott of flagship university rankings.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Predicted apprenticeship levy yield drops by £200m.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Clever teachers don’t work long hours, says former government adviser.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘FE Commissioner; colleges will have to specialize to survive.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [That time of year](#). The Chancellor issued his first (and last) Autumn Statement with little to excite education but with an overall commitment to invest in infrastructure and innovation and to getting the house in order for Brexit
- [What it all means \(1.\)](#) The Institute for Fiscal Studies published its regular widely regarded analysis and assessment of the Autumn Statement with a number of different presentations covering their thoughts on the fiscal rules, tax and benefit reforms and the outlook for living standards
- [What it all means \(2.\)](#) The Resolution Foundation also offers its own well-regarded analysis of the Autumn Statement covering the impact of Brexit, new fiscal rules and the impact on families in particular
- [Let’s hear it for business](#). The Prime Minister addressed business leaders at the annual CBI Conference where she promised among other things an extra £2bn a year by 2020 for science and research, a new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund and a number of green papers on reform of corporate governance and executive pay before the end of this year
- [Looking to innovate](#). The CBI/Deloitte/Hays business survey, published on the eve of the CBI Annual Conference reported that 70% of businesses plan to maintain or increase their innovation spending in the build-up to Brexit but that a lack of technical skills remains a concern for many

HE

- [Still counting](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) challenged the Office for Budget Responsibility’s (OBR) latest sober projections on future student numbers included as part of the latest economic predictions
- [Brexit and HE](#). The Chair of the Education Committee wrote a comment piece for Wonkhe outlining some of the lines of inquiry his Committee intended to pursue with the call for evidence on the impact of Brexit now closed and the Committee about to embark on a sift of evidence
- [Lifelong learning](#). The University Alliance mission group called for new lifelong learning accounts, focused advice and guidance and more support for disadvantaged learners as it published a new lifelong learning manifesto intended to help the government’s social mobility aspirations
- [TEF in or out?](#) The Guardian looked at how far universities were going to play ball with the new Teaching Excellence Framework suggesting some were considering opting out



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FE/Skills

- **No great change.** The AoC's Assistant Chief Exec Julian Gravatt provided a useful summary of the impact of the Autumn statement on the college sector with the essence in the title
- **Keeping you up to speed.** The Skills Funding Agency published its latest little update for employers on apprenticeship developments covering the standards, levy and digital service
- **QAR rules.** The Skills Funding Agency issued a brief Paper spelling out the latest rules for calculating and reporting Qualification Achievement Rates (QARs) for 2016/17

Schools

- **Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy.** The government published the recent review by Sir Nick Weller into the performance of secondary schools in the North of England with a number of recommendations for raising standards for young people as part of the Northern Powerhouse initiative
- **Making the grade.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) kept up the pace with a new report looking this time at the awarding of Ofsted grades for schools over the last decade, suggesting a worrying negative correlation between disadvantaged school intake and low inspection grades
- **Getting ready for work.** Ofsted published a new report raising a number of concerns about a lack of prioritisation, co-ordination and overall strategy in the provision of work-related provision in schools
- **Primary performance.** The LSE's Centre for Economic Performance examined how far turning primary schools in England into academies in the first couple of years of the policy had helped raise performance and found little evidence that it had
- **Now, Teach.** The organization created to help career professionals consider switching to teaching in the later stages of their career, gained a new high-profile recruit as the FT's Lucy Kellaway announced she is to train as a maths teacher from next summer
- **Seldon School of headship.** In another announcement about recruiting career professionals, the Spectator's Toby Young outlined the work Sir Anthony Seldon was doing to help create a new training route for those who might want to switch mid - career into school leadership
- **MAT leadership.** And still on professional training, UCL's Institute of Education and Deloitte launched its new leadership programme for those leading or aiming to lead multi-academy trusts (MATs)
- **Two become one.** The two former charities, Teaching Leaders and The Future LeadersTrust, announced they were merging to become 'Ambition School Leadership' but keeping their focus on maintaining and strengthening school leadership and support particularly in disadvantaged areas
- **Widening gaps.** The newly formed Ambition School Leadership charity published research based on EPI data highlighting the challenges faced in the new Opportunity Areas where disadvantaged pupils are often nearly two years behind their better - off peers by the time they reach the GCSE stage
- **Time to share.** The DfE and Ofsted signed a Memorandum of Understanding setting out how they would share sensitive information on safeguarding
- **Speed dating.** A free online service, run by the Education and Employers and National Governors Association Groups, was launched with the aim of helping schools find and train governors and trustees

Tweet(s) of the week

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- “Heads disappointed by Autumn Statement funding omission. That’s putting it mildly” - [@Stevelredale](#)
- “Youngsters need fresh air, playing together, outdoor adventure and nature – not stuck in front of a grand auto sickfest on their screens” - [@Anthony Seldon](#)
- “We want government to commit to spending 3% of GDP on R and D by 20205 - [@drechsler_paul](#)” - [@CBItweets](#)
- “Frequent swearing linked to high intelligence, study finds” - [@Independent](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- Match fit. It’s what the Chancellor has declared he’s trying to do for the economy ahead of Brexit and any potential extra time and penalties
- “It takes a German worker four days to produce what a UK worker makes in five.” The point was made by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement this week when talking about our low levels of productivity. The useful Full Fact service checked and it’s broadly true: it actually takes a German worker about 4 ½ days to our five
- PISA and science literacy. In just over a week’s time, the OECD will publish the latest PISA test results which this year focus on how well 15 year olds, in what will now be 72 countries, have performed in tests in science literacy, reading and maths. The tests tend to attract considerable attention and often some handwringing in terms of how an individual country has performed. As part of its build up to P-day, the OECD has been publishing briefing notes including last week, one on how it has tackled assessing science literacy which embraces three skills: explaining phenomena scientifically; evaluating and designing scientific enquiry; interpreting data and evidence scientifically. A link to the 4-page briefing is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “We have gold standard universities but we are not strong enough in STEM subjects and our technical education isn’t good enough” – the PM outlines the skills challenge in a speech to business leaders
- “Mr Speaker I am abolishing the Autumn Statement” – the Chancellor ends his 2016 Autumn Statement by abolishing the next one
- “You could say I’m having my cake and eating it because I will still write for the FT. After all, there are long school holidays” – FT journalist Lucy Kellaway who may need the school holidays as she makes her switch to teaching
- “We pulled children out of the mines once. We must take teachers out of the same mines that we put the children into” – former government adviser on teacher training Sir Andrew Carter highlights the long hours culture facing many teachers
- “I am a fully signed up supporter of targets and data but these are hardly the things that enthuse me – or I suspect many others – about education” – former Education Secretary Estelle Morris reflects on the current arid state of education
- “It’s not easy, sometimes it actually hurts but it’s always worth doing” – The incoming new Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, on the importance of taking time to listen to views, even when critical



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- “What’s the point of a consultation if you know the outcomes before you start?” – education commentator John Howson wonders about the grammar school consultation after hearing the Chancellor commit more money to them
- “Does it just mean that I’m in a sticky situation?” – The Guardian goes in search of the JAMs (just about managing) families
- “This smacks to me of another gimmick” – Tom Bennett remains unconvinced about the launch of the latest educational game from Microsoft

Number(s) of the week

- 1.4%. The Office for Budget Responsibility’s growth forecast for 2017, down from 2.1% for 2016
- 500. How many extra staff Facebook intend to take on in the UK next year
- 400. How many people under 30 in the UK are now earning more than £1m a year (up a third on last year) according to latest research
- £8,000. What the most disadvantaged higher ed students in Wales might expect to get from 2018/19 in the form of a maintenance grant intended to help cover tuition fees
- £2.6bn. The projected apprenticeship levy fee income in its first year, 2017/18, according to figures from the Office for Budget Responsibility
- £8m. The planned running costs or next year at least of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
- 34. The number of colleges now in the Collab group with South East Essex College being the latest to join
- 2%. The drop in the number of postgrads entering initial teacher training this year according to latest government figures
- 13.9%. The latest figures for 16-24 year olds NEETs, up very slightly (0.1) on the previous quarter
- 1,221. The correct answer to the question of what is $936 + 285$ which the government’s testing agency unfortunately got wrong in its initial SATs guidance published this week
- £500. How much state schools might want to ask parents for by way of an annual financial contribution, according to one leading educationalist
- £415. How much the average Brit will spend in the build-up to Christmas (up 4.5% on last year) according to the comparison website MoneySuperMarket

What to look out for next week

- Publication of TIMMS 2015/TIMMS Advanced 2015 international maths and science outcomes (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness sessions on MATs and area reviews (Wednesday)
- SSAT National Conference (Thursday, Friday)
- FE ResearchEd Event (Saturday)