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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 28 October 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

Four important headlines this week, most of them concerning FE and HE.

They include an announcement of new FE legislation, an update on future apprenticeship funding arrangements, concerns about Sixth Form College funding and the first set of figures for uni entry 2017 from UCAS. This is very much the time of year when the FE sector comes to the fore, the annual Colleges' Conference and parallel Skills Show for instance both take place in a few weeks. This year, it looks as if FE attention is coming early.

That legislation first. It's been ten years since the last major piece of FE legislation was introduced and late on Thursday afternoon, the government made the announcement that it was going to switch attention from a schools reform Bill to one for FE. The schools system reform by the way hasn't completely gone away, 'the grammar schools stuff' as the BBC's Chris Cook put it remains but the White Paper from earlier this year has gone off to that dusty shelf in the sky.

Back to the FE Bill or to give it its full title: the Technical and Further Education Bill. In essence, it's more of a mopping up than setting out a grand new vision type of Bill. A large chunk of it deals with establishing a new insolvency regime for FE colleges while other clauses deal with extending the remit of the Institute for Apprenticeships to cover the technical routes proposed under the Sainsbury Review and the future sharing of data should adult skills be devolved under local plans. Away from the technicalities, it is the tone and title that's important; this is about boosting technical education, that's why the T is at the front of the Bill.

Second this week, apprenticeships where amongst a battery of papers released on the subject, the government made some concessions on funding arrangements for next year when the levy is due in. The main concessions include an additional 20% uplift for provision for 16-18 year olds as a one year transitional arrangement, additional funding to replace the former disadvantage area uplift, and some relaxations on sub-contracting and the time scale for using the levy funds. FE Week has been leading the campaign for these changes and their [summary](#) of the details is worth a read.

Third, funding for Sixth Form Colleges, where according to the latest annual survey by the Association, things are proving pretty tough with courses being cut and as many as 90% of those surveyed viewing the future with increasing alarm. The VAT issue remains an open wound for the sector, a £385,914m wound last year and will force many down the academy route. The Association describes it all as a wake-up call.

Finally, those UCAS figures, the first ones in the latest application round and while still fairly selective, showing a drop in EU applicants. It's early days but Brexit is being singled out; we haven't heard the last.



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Top headlines this week

- 'New teachers: 30% of 2010 intake quit within five years.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Ofsted questions English and maths resits policy.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Area reviews going 'remarkably well' insists FE Commissioner.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'A' levels choice reduced by funding squeeze.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Government formally drops academies legislation.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [One in, one out](#). The government announced that it was dropping its proposed Education for All schools reform Bill (although it would continue with the consultation) but would introduce a new Technical and Further Education Bill to legislate for changes in this area instead
- [Apprenticeship update](#). The Education Secretary issued a written statement on apprenticeship funding for May 2017 on incorporating a number of concessions in the light of recent consultation and debate
- [Board review](#). The Skills Minister announced a major review of ITBs (Industry Training Boards) to take into account such recent developments as the introduction of the apprenticeship levy system
- [Dear Chancellor](#). The CBI submitted its proposals to the Chancellor ahead of the Autumn Statement next month calling among other things for a delay in the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, assurances around immigration, and infrastructure investment as part of an £11.5bn package
- [The state we're in](#). Deloitte and Reform published their latest annual 'State of the State' report highlighting ten issues, including six relevant to education (public finances; regional funding; employment regulations; visas and immigration; workforce arrangements; and HE) which may require new UK public sector management post Brexit
- [The \\$1trillion prize](#). PWC published its latest Youth Index arguing that by adopting such youth empowerment policies as apprenticeships, technical education and social inclusion, total economic gain across the OECD as a whole could be as much as \$1trillion

HE

- [Uni entry 2017](#). UCAS published the first set of figures for 2017 entry covering applications for Oxbridge, medicine, dentistry and veterinary courses, showing the total number of applicants up by 1% but a noticeable 9% drop this year in EU applicants
- [Detailing the numbers](#). Wonkhe published a useful analysis of 2014/15 data looking at which universities had the highest number of foreign undergrads and postgrads and who therefore might feel the pressure if things change post Brexit
- [Over the border](#). The Herald in Scotland reported that while the government there was prepared for Scottish universities to participate in the current HE's Bill's Teaching Excellence Framework if they



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wanted to, the sector was less keen about the Bill's proposal to encourage alternative providers to enter the market

- **Quality systems.** HEFCE published updated guidance on its 2016/17 Annual Provider Review (APR) process where some of the quality metrics will correlate with the fledgling TEF
- **No winners here.** The students' panel for the Student Accommodation of the Year Awards refused to select a winner from the nominees out forward on the grounds that rents were too high and disadvantaged students were being priced out
- **Moving on.** Pam Tatlow, Chief Exec of MillionPlus, announced her decision to step down from the role next March

FE/Skills

- **Apprenticeship funding.** The government published the latest details on apprenticeship funding in England from next May when the levy starts showing some welcome changes to the funding for 16-18 apprenticeships and to some flexing of the timescale of digital accounts
- **Class register.** The Skills Funding Agency invited initial applications to its RoATP (Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers) which levied employers will use from next year when they come to choosing a preferred provider for apprenticeship provision
- **Online dating.** The Skills Funding Agency also announced the launch of a new tool to help employers in England find suitable apprenticeship training as part of its new digital apprenticeship service
- **What do you think of it so far?** The government published its latest commissioned research on what employers and apprentices think of their apprenticeship schemes over the last year with both groups rating their respective experiences in the high 80%^s
- **Wake-up call.** The Sixth Form Colleges association issued what it described as a wake-up call as it published the results of its latest annual funding survey indicating that 66% had already dropped courses and 90% of those surveyed were worried about their future financial viability
- **Going swimmingly.** The (departing) FE Commissioner gave evidence to the Education Committee on how the current area review process in FE was going arguing that it was going well, that it should result in savings of some £200m+ a year and that it would be a useful exercise for school sixth forms to go through as well
- **Preparing for the worst.** The government confirmed, following recent consultation, that it will move ahead and introduce a statutory insolvency regime for FE and Sixth Form colleges, to be in place for the start of the 2018/19 academic year
- **What's it worth?** The Centre for Vocational Education reported on the results from the first stage of its research work into the value of vocational qualifications suggesting a high return on higher level BTECs in particular

Schools

- **Pay ceiling.** The Secretary of State wrote to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) asking for their thoughts on how best to apply the 2017/18 pay settlement particularly at a time of pressure on teacher recruitment and retention
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- **Defining disadvantage.** Impetus, the Private Equity Foundation which focuses on supporting disadvantaged young people, called for a new way of measuring the PM's 'just managing' group when it comes to education putting forward four options as a starting point
- **Practice makes perfect.** Neuroscience expert Dr Helen Abadzi highlighted the importance of formal learning and rote practice in a lecture on learning given as part of the latest Cambridge Festival of Ideas that warmed the hearts of traditionalists
- **Top ten tips.** Headguruteacher Tom Sherrington listed ten essentials in a new blog that can make for great teaching, from knowing how to ask questions to reinforcing learning
- **Treading the boards.** A theatre in Northampton announced plans to open what would potentially be the first free school in England to focus on the performing arts

Tweet(s) of the week

- "One source says ditching Education Bill a victory for those who want to stall the lifting of standards – the PM has allowed the blob to win" [@bbclaurak](#)
- "Bischof: The British are good at training their elites but not their foot soldiers" - [@EduSkillsHE](#)
- "No student involved in decision on who chairs the Office FOR Students. They looking for a student chair?" - [@nusuk](#)
- "MP says social media is 'corrosive' as he reveals his own daughter text him to ask about dinner" - [@TelegraphNews](#)
- "Nothing worse than someone correcting the grammar you've corrected to them back to the incorrect grammar" - [@AnaRhOdes](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- The Age of Fear? We heard a lot about Project Fear during the Referendum and for many, a sense of unease remains. The think tank Demos is conducting a wider piece of research looking at changes in areas like public policy and social cohesion at a pan-European level to try and understand broader moods and developments. Its early research has produced some interesting results. For example, there appears to be widespread pessimism across Europe about both their own nation's and the EU's long-term prospects. But more positively, many countries, notably Spain, Sweden and Britain remain supportive of diversity. The research is [here](#).

Quote(s) of the week

- "My first 6 months as Ofqual's Chief Regulator has been something of a mental workout" – Sally Collier outlines the training needed as Chief Regulator in her opening address to last week's FAB Conference
- "It might be the catalyst we all need" – the Chair of the Russell Group of universities strikes a positive note on Brexit in contrast to the majority in the HE sector who voted in the Referendum to remain
- "The most radical reform of post-16 education since the introduction of A' levels almost 70 years ago" – the Skills Minister pumps up the importance of the Sainsbury/Skills Plan



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- “Don’t rock the boat” - the FE Commissioner offers advice to his successor as he prepares to hand over the reins
- “It’s wrong in education to be guided by pristine ideology” – Michael Gove proves a point as he shifts position on grammar schools
- “If policy were based on statements of the Bleedin’ Obvious, every child and every school might be given a fair chance of success” – leading education commentator John Dunford on a new approach to evidence based policy making
- “They are all obsessed by data, spreadsheets and raising levels of attainment, and are brilliant networkers” – education writer Francis Gilbert takes the modern head teacher to task

Number(s) of the week

- 0.5%. How much the UK economy grew in the three months after the Referendum (down slightly from the 0.7% of the previous quarter but higher than predicted)
- 8%. The increase in the number of 18 year olds in England applying for university at this stage in the application round according to the latest stats from UCAS
- £147. The average weekly rent for student rooms in universities in 2015/16, up 23% over the last five years
- 88. How many colleges are currently considering merger options according to the FE Commissioner
- 80,650. The number of applications received for 24+ advanced learning loans in 2015/16, up from 67,280 the year before (the Diploma for Fitness Instructing and Personal Training was the most popular for loan applications)
- £45bn a year. How much high youth unemployment is costing the UK economy each year according to figures from PWC
- 86%. How many employers remain committed to offering apprenticeships next year (up 7% on 2014,) according to the latest, 2015, evaluation of employer attitudes commissioned by government
- 39%. The number of Sixth Form Colleges surveyed who’ve dropped modern foreign language courses because of funding restraints according to the Association’s latest survey
- 16. The number of full-time equivalent officials working on the Schools Green Paper and associated policies
- 7,230. The number of newly qualified teachers who joined the profession in 2010 and have since left (out of a total of 24,100) according to recent official figures
- 1 hour a day. The amount of screen time two – five year olds should be limited to according to the latest advice from the American Academy of Paediatrics

What to look out for next week

- Teaching awards ceremony shown on BBC2 at 6.00 pm. (Sunday)
- Backbench MPs debate on apprenticeship funding. (Tuesday)
- AELP Autumn Conference. (Tuesday)