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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 7 April 2017



(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

Apprenticeships, school finances and perceptions of qualifications: three issues to round off this final week before the Easter break.

Apprenticeships first, which this week have seen the new funding levy come in and the Institute for Apprenticeships get under way, both to the sound of considerable noise. Much of the noise has been about the levy, still a controversial subject two years after its initial announcement in the 2015 Summer Budget and continuing through to its introduction this week. The government has offered some support as part of the deal, not least for example the 10% monthly top-up, but the question as to how far this is seen as a tax or an investment remains open as the six point statement issued by the CBI on the same day, indicates. The statement is listed in the Skills section below but its overall message is for greater flexibility and reassurance generally.

The government is hoping to generate at least £2.5bn+ from the levy by 2019/20. This is to help support apprenticeship training at a time when a skilled workforce is likely to be in greater demand than ever before, so this is a critical moment for skills development in this country. As such it's been accompanied by a couple of other important government documents this week. One was the high-level guidance for the Institute for Apprenticeships, the new body that will oversee apprenticeships, and from next year, technical provision as well. Its remit is built around four core functions with a big job to do on standards, assessment, quality, and funding and a big steer on higher-level apprenticeships and social mobility. And the other was a 'who does what' Paper as the new apprenticeship era begins, outlining the roles of eight strategic bodies though strangely not including Employer Trailblazers or Awarding Organisations.

Next school finances. The government dipped into its pot this week to put some more money in for school places and school fabric, both necessary given the report out this week by the Funding Agency suggesting a further 211,000 places are needed by next year. The money will be welcome of course but less welcome perhaps will be the numbers of schools now said to be resorting to voluntary contributions and fund raising. This week, the FT reported on a primary school which had gone into this big time. The story is below.

Finally, an important moment in the qualification calendar with Ofqual's annual survey of views from the public and professionals alike on the qualification system. It's doubly important this year with the introduction of the new GCSE grading scale which according to these figures collated at the end of last year, suggest that the profession is well aware of the new scale but that the general public and employers are less so, hovering around 30% in their case. The better news is that at 84%, young people are more aware although this is before the government intervened and defined a pass as either standard or strong.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Degree apprenticeships to be regulated by HEFCE not Ofsted. ([Monday](#))
- 'Pressure on school places.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Half of teenagers never seen a play.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Corbyn promises free primary school meals for all.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Don't blame teachers for fluctuations in exam results, say researchers.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Industrial Visit](#). The Ministerial Business team visited Yorkshire to discuss the government's Industrial Strategy as consultation on the Strategy moved into its final few days
- [Six of the best](#). The CBI listed six concerns and six ways to improve the apprenticeship levy including greater flexibility over its use and timescale, clearer long-term success measures and speedier approval of new standards
- [Please Sir](#). The Labour Party announced that a future Labour government would extend free school meals to all primary schools pupils funded through the introduction of VAT on private school fees
- [Lifelong learning](#). The Skills Commission reported on the growing importance of older workers (which it defined as aged 50+) recommending a number of proposals to help improve working arrangements including the creation of a dedicated Minister, institutional staff with specific responsibilities and support for older apprentices
- [Selection by house price](#). The Centre for Policy Studies published a new Bulletin looking at the issue of education selection by house price concluding that part of the answer lay in creating more grammar and free schools particularly in areas where few good schools exist
- [Myth buster](#). Ofsted published its latest version, aimed this time at early years inspections, and tackling such myths as 'Ofsted wants to see as much paperwork as possible:' it doesn't

HE

- [Quality assured](#). The government confirmed that HEFCE would have responsibility for regulating apprenticeships at Levels 6 and 7 and Ofsted for Levels 4 and 5 with joint responsibility where provision overlaps
- [University autonomy](#). Nick Hillman, Director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) gave the inaugural lecture to the G20 group of universities on the theme of institutional autonomy arguing that autonomy had been strengthened by such recent UK reforms as increasing tuition fees and lifting student number controls
- [Taking a closer look](#). The National Audit Office announced it was going to take a look at how the HE market was operating and how far for instance students were being treated as informed customers, with a report date set for later this year



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FE/Skills

- [Apprenticeship accountabilities](#). The government set out in a new report who was accountable for what when it comes to standards, quality, funding, value for money and so on under the new apprenticeship regime
- [Hands on the wheel](#). The government published its latest Strategic Guidance for the new Institute for Apprenticeships listing a number of steers on quality criteria and other policy areas following recent consultation
- [Meeting the target](#). The government issued guidance on how public sector bodies in England with 250+ staff should report progress against their apprenticeship targets
- [Up to the job?](#) The Resolution Foundation discussed the current focus on skills and apprenticeships and pinpointing issues of quantity, quality and clarity as ways of ensuring things will improve in technical training this time round
- [London Calling](#). The Collab Group announced the creation of a pan London group of colleges dedicated to working on and supporting skill and business critical issues for the capital

Schools

- [Capital funds](#). The government allocated further funds from its current funding pot to help with improving school buildings (£1.4bn) and provide for more school places (£980m,) a total of nearly £2.4bn in all
- [Thanks to our sponsor](#). The FT reported on the increasing use of sponsors and fund raising by state schools by case studying one primary school in Birmingham which has managed to raise £45,000 this year
- [School capacity](#). The Education Funding Agency published data on school capacity in primary and secondary schools in 2015/16 noting there had been a net increase since 2010 of 735,000 extra places, mainly in primary but also starting to have an impact on secondary as well
- [All in perception](#). Ofqual published the results of its latest annual survey into varying perceptions of different qualifications revealing that while confidence in formal qualifications remains high, understanding of some of the recent changes remains limited
- [Good to go](#). Ofsted revised its policy on the use of its logos by agreeing providers rated good or outstanding could splash the approved logo on official websites and literature as a mark of quality
- Working 9 - 1. Ofqual blogged about the application of the new grade 9 for this summer's English and maths GCSEs and offered some modelled examples
- [Open book](#). The petition calling for set texts to be allowed into the exam hall for the new GCSE Eng Lit exam reached the required number of signatures and will be debated in Westminster Hall on 24 April

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Academics are as vain and insecure as anyone else. Baroness O'Neill, peer and philosopher" - [@timeshighered](#)
- "The #1 problem in education is that there are too many people actively defending the status quo" - [@drvcourt](#)



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- “Teachers are constantly bashed by ‘experts’ who have little experience of being a teacher themselves” - [@C_Hendrick](#)
- “Spreadsheets are people too” - [@jdportes](#)

Other stories of the week

- Bad grammar. This week much of the media reported on the self-styled grammar vigilante in Bristol who in the middle of the night went out with his ‘Apostrophiser’ to correct misplaced apostrophes in shop signs that so offended him. How far the misuse of apostrophes and other grammatical errors should be tolerated has always divided opinion, remember Churchill’s famous: ‘this is the type of arrant pedantry up with which I will not put.’ More recent grammar gurus have suggested that grammar can help define a person. For those that want to check out their gerunds and their ablatives, the Daily Telegraph which carried the story about the grammar vigilante, also included a good grammar test, details of which can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “The interests of our citizens is our first priority” – the European Parliament’s Brexit negotiator calls for an early resolution on an issue worrying many in education
- “This is a key part of the jigsaw that will ensure employers get the skills their workforce needs” – the Minister heralds the arrival of the new Institute for Apprenticeships
- “So many of the issues in our country that politicians spend much of their time thinking about how to tackle, are ultimately related to skills” – Nadhim Zahawi MP, former government adviser on apprenticeships, welcomes the apprenticeship levy which came into force this week
- “The sums don’t add up” – the Independent Schools Council responds to Labour Party proposals to extend free school meals to all primary school pupils
- “There will inevitably be a period of bedding in as teachers and schools become more familiar with the changes” – Ofqual reports on public and professional perceptions of the qualification changes
- “I recoil against using children as measurement probes” – Professor Brian Cox worries that children are being used as instruments of testing
- “I think not losing children early is really important, and one of the ways that we can do that is to stop saying that we are crap at maths and having it as a badge of honour” – TV’s Rachel Riley offers her analysis of current issues in maths

Number(s) of the week

- £7.05 an hour. The new minimum wage for 21 – 24 year olds from this week, (£7.50 for 25+, £5.60 for 18-20 year olds and £4.05 for 16-17 year olds)
- 9.5%. The unemployment figure across the Eurozone in February, down slightly on the previous month with the Czech Republic (3.4%) and Germany (3.9) faring best and Greece (23.1) and Spain (18%) faring worst according to figures from the Eurostats agency
- 2.4%. The drop in the latest index for the manufacturing sector over the first quarter of the year according to the purchasing managers’ index



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- 451. The number of novice organisations approved as a provider under the new Register of Apprenticeship Training
- 230,000. The number of primary and secondary school places needed between now and 2020 according to latest government figures
- £700 - £900m. How much it would cost to provide free school meals to all primary school pupils according to House of Commons figures
- 11. The number of research schools following the latest announcement of six more by the Education Endowment Foundation and Institute for Effective Education
- £905. How much more it would cost for a family of four to take a holiday at the start of August rather than at the start of July according to travel company figures provided as part of the latest court case

What to look out for next week

- Parliament in recess