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## Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 10 March 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

The best news for some people this week came in the form of research from the US which revealed that Mocha Lattes improve attention spans; good news for coffee and chocolate lovers at least.

How much other good news there's been this week where the Budget of course has dominated many of the headlines is a matter of judgement. "Well done Phil. Sound money and fiscal responsibility are the only secure foundations of a fair and strong economy," tweeted the former Chancellor on hearing the details, 'pain delayed, not pain cancelled' concluded the BBC's Business Editor. Budgets inevitably attract mixed reactions but this one came with a big build-up for education and skills and so carries particular interest.

The [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) and [Resolution Foundation](#) among many offer excellent analysis but for education and skills, arguably four headlines stand out.

First, a recognition at last of the importance of skills and technical training. It's taken some time as Miranda Green argued in the FT this week but a combination of concerns about productivity levels and the need to ensure any economic spoils are more fairly spread, has at last seen a Chancellor commit to funds to this unsung area. Some of this money, £300m, is to be used to support research talent over the coming years under the Industrial Strategy but the biggest chunk, £500m by 2021, will go to support the implementation of the new 16-19 T-levels. The government has been concerned about low course hours for some technical training so this will help extend programmes to an average 900 hours a year but also help with the proposed 1-3 month work placements. So some jam tomorrow but it suggests the government means business.

Second, and in contrast, the government clearly intends to push ahead with reforming the school system and introducing more selective provision under the premise of greater choice. It remains a controversial area and we await further details in the forthcoming White Paper but the Budget has shored up the offer with additional funds through the free school programme. According to a National Audit Office report last month, schools need at least a further £6.7bn to repair the school fabric let alone needing to provide a further 420,000 pupil places by 2021. How far the funds announced cover this as well remains to be seen.

Third, it's only a small purse but the Chancellor has promised the DfE £40m over the next couple of years to test out approaches to lifelong learning. With the Taylor review looking at changing work practices and the Resolution Foundation highlighting continuing education for an ageing population, this is important.

And fourth, cities, regions and local skills commissioning; alive and well as the references to London and the Midlands indicated but a lot hinging on the Mayoral elections in May.

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## Top headlines this week

- ‘Vocational training shake-up most ambitious since A’ levels.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘GCSE grading revamp is causing uncertainty.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Ed dept goes cap in hand to Parliament for emergency funds after £3bn overspend.’ ([Wed](#))
- ‘Degree apprenticeships on verge of success.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Ofsted launches investigation into ‘scandal’ of schools gaming the system.’ ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [Spring Budget](#). The Chancellor delivered his one and only Spring Budget before things revert to an autumn schedule, highlighting the resilience of the country’s economy but also the need to plan for the future with higher skill levels and continued efficiencies
- [National Apprenticeship Week](#). A huge range of activities have been taking place as part of this week’s 10<sup>th</sup> annual National Apprenticeship Week were the theme has been the Skills Minister’s favourite ‘ladder of opportunity’
- [More on Brexit](#). The House of Lords EU Committee reported on its Inquiry into the free movement of people post-Brexit calling on the government not to shut off options while Brexit negotiations were under way and concluding that a transition period for different sectors may be needed
- [Midlands Engine](#). The government outlined further details for growth and development in the Midlands with the launch of its Midlands Engine Strategy and £20m promised to support work under a Midlands Skills Challenge
- [Barber trimmings](#). The government announced the appointment of Sir Michael Barber to advise on how to bring more efficiency into the delivery of public services and government activity generally
- [Working for everyone](#). The RSA launched the final report from its Inclusive Growth Commission which has spent the last year considering ways of supporting local and inclusive growth and concluding with four key sets of recommendations around city regions and social contracts
- [Legally unsure](#). The Policy Exchange think tank published a collection of expert essays examining the disconnect between education policy aims and education legislation concluding that too often they end up pulling in different directions

### HE

- [Spring Budget](#). The Chancellor promised £300m over the next four years to help build a pipeline of high-skilled research talent including 1,000 additional PhD places largely in STEM disciplines
- [International worth](#). Universities UK published the results of some commissioned research showing that international HE students contributed some £25.8bn to the UK economy in 2014/15 in the form of fees, visitors, off-campus activities and accommodation charges



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- **Degree apprenticeships.** Universities UK published an upbeat report on the take-up of degree apprenticeships suggesting more universities were considering offering them and increasing numbers of people applying for them with over seven and a half thousand set to take them by the end of the year
- **Reading the small print.** HEFCE outlined what sort of information HE providers should make available for prospective students as part of the Unistats arrangements including details on teaching, learning, assessment and fees
- **Accelerated degrees.** The Chief Exec of the London School of Business and Finance (LSBF) blogged about whether degree programmes should be 2,3 or 4 years in length, arguing that there was no ideal length, what mattered was the needs of the student

## FE/Skills

- **Spring Budget.** The Chancellor promised an additional £500m a year from 2019/20 to help provide additional hours, high-quality work placements and other support for the introduction of new T-level programmes as proposed by the Sainsbury Review
- **Maintenance loans.** The Chancellor confirmed in his Spring Budget that the government would introduce maintenance loans to students on L4-6 technical level courses in National Colleges and Institutes of Technology
- **Lifelong learning.** The Chancellor promised £40m of funding by 2018/19 for the DfE in his Spring Budget to pilot different approaches to lifelong learning
- **Time for TNA.** The Education and Training Foundation announced a major training needs analysis (TNA) of the skills and qualities needed by staff working in the FE and training sectors as they face a whammy of challenges from the Skills Plan, Industrial Strategy and apprenticeship developments
- **Possibility Thinking.** The Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) continued its conversation with the sector by publishing a second collection of essays from leading players under the theme of 'what if'
- **Mystery shopper.** The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) announced that it was carrying out a mystery shopper exercise to test out how ready providers were for the implementation of the levy and other reforms

## Schools

- **Free school programme.** The Chancellor promised £320m during the current Parliament to support the development of the school system with more free schools, maths schools and selective places with free school meal pupils granted free transport to attend the nearest selective school
- **School buildings.** The Chancellor also pledged as part of the Spring Budget to provide a further £216m to help with school buildings and maintenance
- **SEND in the money.** The government announced a cash boost for special educational needs (SEND) with most councils set to receive at least £500,000 to help with increasing access and capacity
- **Working 9 – 1.** Ofqual geared up for the summer exams with a further reminder of the changes coming to the grading scale for GCSE, lists of resources to help those who need to know more about it all and the launch of a big campaign on social and other media



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- **Short inspections.** The (new) Chief Inspector used her first monthly commentary to report on the findings of a new study into the reliability of Ofsted's short inspection model concluding that while there's always more that can be done to increase reliability, the short inspection model appears to be working efficiently
- **Enterprise Advisers.** The Careers and Enterprise Company reported as part of National Careers Week that large numbers of people, many in senior business roles, have now signed up as volunteer Enterprise Advisers helping schools and colleges with careers and employer engagement activity

## Tweets(s) of the week

- "I see the ever rotating wheel of FE policy has landed back on GNVQs" - [@xtophercook](#)
- "Employers keep sending me #nationalapprenticeshipweek numbers re notices of apprentices they're hiring like E German tractor production figs" - [@GregHurstTimes](#)
- "Rushed free schools that are also grammar schools? It's like catching a cold and multiplying it by flu" - [@miss\\_mcinerney](#)

## Other stories of the week

- **C.V. mistakes.** A recruiter who has spent much of the last few years ploughing through thousands of cvs, this week identified some of the most common mistakes that applicants make. Some are obvious and include things like not checking for spelling mistakes and using too many buzzwords but one lesser known error often made is to start a sentence with the words 'Responsible for.' The problem with this is that it only describes the requirements of a particular job and says nothing about the person's particular qualities and skills evidenced in accomplishing the job...vital factors a recruiter needs to know
- **Supply apps.** Schools Week provided an interesting article this week on the growing use of teacher supply apps now being used by schools to fill vacancies at reduced costs. The approach was highlighted in a report on the future of public services by the think tank Reform earlier this year which compared it to an Uber style system. There are obvious issues about safeguarding and quality although some formal checking does go on and so far the systems matching schools to teachers and vice versa seem to be working well. A link to the article can be found [here](#)

## Quote(s) of the week

- "I was the Shadow Education Secretary who first argued for their introduction and I remain a passionate advocate" – the Prime Minister on her support for Free Schools
- "There is still a lingering of doubt about the parity of esteem attaching to technical education pursued through the FE route. Today we end that doubt for good with the introduction of T- levels" – the Chancellor solves the long-running issue of parity of esteem at a stroke
- "On current forecasts, earnings will be no higher in 2022 than they were in 2007. Fifteen years without a pay rise. I'm rather lost for superlatives" - the Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies is lost for words when it comes to wage restraint
- "As for the government's assumption that resident UK workers will eventually fill the jobs vacated by EU migrant workers, the evidence base to support or refute this is simply not there" – the Lords Brexit Committee challenge the government over its Brexit plans on migrant labour



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- “There’s never been a more important time to address the UK’s skills shortages” the CBI react to the government’s announcement of more money for technical training
- “It would be better if this government was more noisy about it in my view, but it lives on” – Lord (Jim) O’Neill reflects on the Northern Powerhouse
- “A decent man” – Baroness Helena Kennedy on the HE Minister Jo Johnson
- “A pile of bureaucratic regulations is being heaped up of which Dicken’s Circumlocution Office from Little Dorrit could be proud” – Prof Peter Scott argues the HE Bill will generate a shed load of new regulations
- “Some might say it is about horses for courses, but in education, it really should be about courses for horses” – the Rector of LSBF on the ideal length for degree courses
- “We are just one player in the system” – Ofqual calls on other troops to rally round and help explain the changes coming to the GCSE grading system
- “England’s system of resting so much on superficial measures of institutional success is not taking education to a good place”- education commentator Warwick Mansell examines the dangers in reporting blithely on hero heads
- “I’ve failed my maths GCSE four times. It’s horrible because you feel like you’re stupid” – GCSE English and maths resit students reveal their frustrations to the BBC

## Number(s) of the week

- 2%. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast for UK growth this year, up from an earlier forecast of 1.4%
- 2.4%. The OBR forecast for inflation this year
- £62,000 per household. What the national debt amounts to according to the Chancellor
- 263. The number of peers (a majority of 52) who voted against the government’s proposal in the HE Bill to link TEF results to increased fees, putting the progress of the Bill in jeopardy for a while
- 5,000. The number of people expected to start degree apprenticeships this year, nearly eight times as many as when the scheme was launched in 2015 according to Universities UK
- £500m pa. How much the government is promising to put in to support the development of technical education in FE from 2019/20
- £10m. Roughly how much English Premier League football clubs are likely to have to pay when the new apprenticeship levy comes in according to an analysis by GKP and reported in the TES
- 40%. How many pupils are likely to hit the required standard in the new ‘tougher’ GCSEs this summer according to former Schools Minister David Laws
- £215M. How much extra the government has promised schools in England to help improve capacity and access for pupils with special educational needs

## What to look out for next week

- Education Committee on young people’s mental health and the role of education (Tuesday)
- Education Show (Thursday – Saturday)

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