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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 17 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

Policy churn, English and maths, and funding top the news this week. Here's a word on each.

Policy upheaval in the skills system is nothing new but a report this week by the Institute for Government has laid bare the realities. "Since the 1980s, there have been 28 major pieces of legislation, 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities and no organisation has survived longer than a decade," that's the stark assessment of the impact of policy churn on the FE sector. The intentions have been genuine, a more responsive skills system aligned to the needs of learners, the workforce and the labour market but phew the journey is proving tortuous.

The report points the finger at four factors: competing policy objectives; organisations not given time to prove their worth; too much centralised decision making; and too little policy memory. Each new administration offers hope of a simplified and more coherent system but as the report suggests, unless these factors are addressed it's hard to see things improving. As things stand the latest Industrial Strategy has 61 'must dos' while the Sainsbury Skills Plan has 32, many of which are structural in some form.

Next English and maths and in particular the resit problem for 16-19 year olds, raised in another important report this week this time by the education charity Impetus-PEF. The problem is that asking 16/17 year olds, many of whom are disadvantaged, to keep resitting the same type of exam isn't working. As one college principal put it, it's like putting the same bit of food out each day to try and force a child to eat it, it rarely works as the results last summer proved.

The report suggests a number of possible ways forward including the introduction of a per-student premium half on registration and half on attainment and the development of a genuine alternative qualification such as Functional Skills. These remain under development for a 2019 start but interestingly this week brought news of other practical developments in the form of National Numeracy's 'Essentials of Numeracy' award and the CITB's changes to English and maths teaching for apprenticeships. In both cases, the emphasis is on more practically based learning.

Finally funding, where this week, HEFCE confirmed Board decisions about HE funding for 201/18, the Skills Minister issued the briefest of brief funding letters for FE for 2017/18 confirming maintained budgets for apprenticeships and adult skills but cuts to funding support and the Education Policy Institute issued a report on the potential impact of the funding formula on schools. Consultation on the latter closes next Wednesday and this report tops off a furious build-up of responses warning of trouble ahead. It's not been an easy week.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Teachers still convinced Ofsted grades their lessons.' ([Monday](#))
- 'One in ten GCSE resits gets C grade by 19.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'More than 1,300 apprenticeship providers get green light.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'George Osborne raises concerns over school funding formula.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'All schools to face funding gap by 2020.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **All change.** The Institute for Government examined policy churn and upheaval in three areas that have experienced more change than most including FE and industrial strategy, concluding that poor institutional memory, weak long-term planning and a tendency to recreate new organisations to demonstrate progress were all partly to blame
- **Quality recruitment.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) looked at the levels of educational achievement of graduates entering key public service occupations including teaching, the health service and police and found that while for teaching, graduate entry levels remained at the average median for all HE leavers, those for some non-priority subject areas were slightly below
- **April changes.** Personnel Today highlighted a number of important employment law changes coming in this April including the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, the immigration skills charge and new reporting rules on the gender pay gap
- **National Citizen Service.** The Public Accounts Committee reported on the NCS, now in its sixth year and about to be enshrined in legislation, concluding that while the scheme had merits, there needed to be clearer measures on costs, outcomes and impact as part of future planning
- **Eastern devolution.** The government confirmed details of the new devolution deal for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which will see the Combined Authority take over responsibility for the adult education budget from 2018/19
- **More than books.** The think tank Policy Exchange launched a call for evidence on the role of public libraries and their contribution to social capital in the modern age

HE

- **Cutting the cake.** HEFCE announced its topline funding decisions for universities and colleges for 2017/18 including initial support for pre-registration health service courses, and confirmed that institutional allocations will be confirmed on April 12
- **International students.** The FT examined the long-running issue of including international students in immigration totals and concluded that the case for it was unproven

FE/Skills

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- **Funding Letter.** The Skills Minister published the annual funding letter for the skills sector for 2017/18 covering funding for the core priorities of apprenticeships, adult education and advanced learner loans
- **RoATP.** The government published the initial list of approved apprenticeship training providers registered to operate under the new apprenticeship service with a further application round to follow later this month
- **English and maths resits.** The education charity Impetus-PEF pointed to what they called ‘a crisis’ in the levels of support and success for young people seeking to improve their English and maths grades recommending among other things a funded support package and quality Functional Skill alternatives
- **Making TPE work.** The Campaign for Learning and NCFE published a commissioned report looking at what’s needed to make technical and professional education (TPE) a reality arguing that greater clarity on what constitutes TPE, on how it should align with HE and on the role of the IfA would all help
- **Industrial Strategy.** The Centre for Cities think tank announced that its chief exec, Alexandra Jones, had been appointed to the BEIS Dept to lead on the government’s Industrial Strategy

Schools

- **Apprenticeships R Us.** The DfE published a guide for schools on apprenticeships to help them assess who should be paying the levy and how to make best use of the apprenticeship system generally
- **Partially selective.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) looked at how well pupils perform in schools that operate partial selection and found no evidence to support improved progress with in some cases, a negative impact
- **Exclusion guidance.** The DfE launched a brief consultation on changes to statutory guidance for school exclusions intended to make responsibilities clearer and due to come into effect from Sept this year
- **Health and education.** The Health and Education Select Committees took evidence on the role of education in helping support young people with mental health concerns where they heard that cuts to services, exam pressures and social media were particular concerns
- **Leadership Development.** Teach First announced the seven universities it was working with this year to help deliver its enhanced Leadership Development programme which will now combine teacher training with leadership development
- **Knight’s tale.** Former Labour Schools Minister Jim Knight offered his thoughts on the proposed new T-levels, praising the concept but arguing that unless the EBacc allowed for more curriculum space, schools may struggle to embrace them

Tweets(s) of the week

- “Has the digital revolution been overhyped as magical pixie dust that can cure all teaching ills?” @Jisc
- “The Dyson Institute will fill a vacuum in education” - @FEontap
- “In 2014-15, int’l students generated £1bn in tax revenues, equivalent to the salaries of 31,700 nurses or 25,000 police officers” @UniversitiesUK
- “Public sector pay will fall in real terms by £1,700 between 2010 and 2020” - @tes



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Other stories of the week

- Top 10 dumbest university rankings ever. With charts, tables and compilations of different aspects of university performance across the world continuing to pour forth, Paul Greatrix, Registrar at the University of Nottingham and a member of Wonkhe 's Editorial Group, offered his own listing of the top ten 'dumbest' listings ranging from the student sex league to University Challenge winners. The full listing can be found [here](#)
- Not just any café. Marks and Spencer announced this week that it was joining forces with the comedian and mental health campaigner Ruby Wax to open a number of what it called 'Frazzled Cafes.' There will be eleven of these initially and they will enable people who are 'frazzled' with modern life and its pressures to come together on a regular basis after hours and talk through their concerns. Ruby Wax, who gave a keynote presentation on mental health at last autumn's AoC Conference, coined the word 'frazzled' for her recent book on mental health and has been leading a campaign for greater support in this area as part of a book tour. A link to the story can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "I can tell you that this has been something that has given me sleepless nights since I took over the job" – Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner on the travails of Labour education policy
- "Some are worried, some are already making plans to leave" Oxford colleges write an open letter to The Times ahead of the Lords Brexit vote expressing their concerns about the government's failure to resolve the status of EU nationals, many of whom work in HE
- "I still think it's the right thing to do" – former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan and instigator of the latest consultation on school funding reform responds to suggestions that the government might be backtracking on the whole thing
- "We estimate that this is likely to mean the average primary school will need to save the equivalent of almost two teachers by 2019/20 and the average secondary school the equivalent of around six teachers" – the Education Policy Institute assesses the potential impact of school funding reforms
- "The government should get existing grammars moving in the right direction before opening new ones" – the Chair of the Sutton Trust offers his thoughts on government proposals for contextualized admissions in grammars
- "The brain is essential for learning but learning styles is just one of a number of common neuromyths that do nothing to enhance education" – academics respond to Brain Awareness Week by raising concerns about the reliance in schools on learning styles
- "When observing lessons and feeding back to teachers afterwards, we must not give the incorrect impression that any graded judgement has been formed" – Ofsted reminds inspectors and teachers that it doesn't grade individual teachers

Number(s) of the week

- 1.58m. The number of people out of work in the three months up to Jan 31 2017, down 31,000 on the previous three months and the lowest rate for over 40 years (although wage growth slowed and the number of people on zero hour contracts increased) according to the Office for National Statistics



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- £4.2bn. How much money the government has set aside for FE and skills training for 2017/18 according to the latest grant letter from the DfE
- 530+. The number of listed events that took place during this year's recent National Apprenticeship Week according to the government
- 1,708. The number of providers listed on the new register of training providers approved to offer apprenticeship training
- 49%. The number of employers who claim during recruitment that graduates don't have the necessary 'soft' skills needed according to a recent survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR)
- 48. The number of secretaries of state over the last 30 years or more who've had some responsibility for FE and skills training according to the Institute for Government
- 13,000. How many UK students were enrolled in EU HE institutions in 2014, the latest year for which data is available, according an answer in Parliament this week
- £935. How much funding per student should be set aside to help improve success levels in English and maths resits according to the education charity Impetus-PEF
- £291,000 and £74,000. How much secondary and primary schools respectively could lose in school funding by 2019/20 according to a report by the Education Policy Institute
- 71%. How many teachers would welcome a duty on schools to promote wellbeing according to a survey by the charity Young Minds
- 300,000+. How many 16/17 year olds have participated in the National Citizen Service over the last 6 years (the current target is 247,000 a year) according to the Public Accounts Committee
- 7. The age at which many children start doing less physical exercise according to a study from the British Journal of Sports Medicine

What to look out for next week

- Education Questions in Parliament (Monday)
- Impetus - PEF launch a report into English and maths catch-up issues (Tuesday)
- Education Policy Institute Spring Roundtable (Tuesday)
- FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference (Wed – Friday)