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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 24 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

Clearly a challenging week in many respects but on the basis of re-connecting with normality where possible, here's what's been happening in the world of education over the past seven days.

First, school funding, a long standing item but one which came to a crescendo this week as consultation closed on the proposed new national funding formula. The government will now look closely at the responses and as the Prime Minister told the Leader of the Opposition on Wednesday, will pronounce in due course. Whether it has any room for manoeuvre given the DfE like other public spending Depts is already facing an efficiency review, let alone whether the system will be ready for implementation in 2019 remains to be seen.

As the tweet from the Head teachers Roundtable below indicates, the issue is not so much that the premise of a more fair distribution of funding is wrong, it's that there isn't enough money on the table in the first place. The government claims that its £300m transition pot which would ensure for instance that no school would lose initially more than 3% per pupil will protect schools but as the Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed out, there needs to be more certainties over how long such protections will last. Otherwise as a survey from school governors this week indicated, subjects could be restricted, class sizes increased and even teacher numbers cut. Lines have been drawn and the government's response will be eagerly awaited.

Second, and still on schools, it now seems that the White Paper on reform of the school system will be published sooner rather than later. The PM was giving nothing away about the contentious issue of selective schooling at a reception for education leaders on Monday but what was perhaps telling was the Paper on house prices in high quality school catchment areas which the DfE published last weekend. A core argument by the government is that we already have a form of school selection by house price with more advantaged families hovering up the property near best performing schools. The Paper, linked below, highlights some of the house premiums involved and we're likely to hear more of it when the White Paper comes out.

Third, pensions and the final report from the government commissioned Cridland inquiry into the state pension age. Both it and the government's actuary dept report which came out at the same time have recommended an increase in the state pension age to 68 and 69 respectively and in the case of Cridland, brought forward by seven years to 2039. Before those aged 45, the age group affected, scream too loud, these are only recommendations and come with a suggestion for a new carer's allowance, support for the disadvantaged and perhaps most intriguingly of all, a mid-life stock take in the form of a mid-life MOT to 'review choices about work, health and retirement.' Not just miles on the clock but a satnav for the future..



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Opposition MPs join forces to oppose grammar schools.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘GCSE and A’ level exam appeals drop by a quarter.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘School governors point to diabolical budget squeeze.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Drop in teacher training recruits revealed.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Poor behaviour not taken seriously enough in schools.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Keep on working](#). The (John) Cridland Report on State Pensions was published recommending among other things that a rise in the state pension age should be brought forward to 2039 with no early access to the state pension but with an opportunity to take stock in mid-life with a mid-life MOT
- [Moving the pillars](#). The government’s Business Team took the 10 pillars of the Industrial Strategy to Wales to discuss growth opportunities with key business and skills players as part of the Strategy’s programme of engaging with the regions
- [Protecting the children](#). The Lords Communications Select Committee reported on its inquiry into children and internet use by calling for the creation of a children’s digital champion, for digital literacy and awareness to be incorporated into the curriculum and for better controls from the online industry
- [Automated services](#). The consultants PWC offered their thoughts on how far robots might steal our jobs over the next couple of decades, suggesting that while jobs in education generally were at a low risk, individuals with lower levels of qualification were more at risk
- [Children’s mental health services](#). The Education Policy Institute (EPI) provided a fairly bleak assessment of how children’s mental health services were performing noting for example that less than a third of Commissioning Groups had fully costed plans in place
- [Childcare arrangements](#). The government launched its dedicated Childcare Choices website to help parents see what support is available as the government’s new schemes start to be rolled out from this April
- [Work experience](#). The DfE published a detailed research report into work experience and work related activities in schools and colleges showing that most tend to organize it centrally but that placements varied a lot between institutions and sectors
- [Science priorities](#). The Chair of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee listed a number of concerns for the Science community ahead of the Brexit negotiations including in particular those around people, investment, collaboration and regulation

HE

- [In sickness and in health](#). HEFCE published its latest report on the financial health of the sector showing a reasonably strong overall balance sheet but concerns about increasing variation across the sector and of the impact of future challenges



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- **Silver jubilee.** The million+ group marked the 25th anniversary of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Acts which transformed much of the HE sector by enabling many HE institutions to gain research and degree awarding powers and claim the title of university, with the launch of a campaign to recognize the contribution of such institutions over the years
- **Online Masters.** Leeds University announced it was working with Pearson to launch a new series of online Masters-level degree programs
- **In the chair.** The Russell Group announced that Professor Anton Muscatelli, current V.C at Glasgow University was to take over as Chair of the Russell Group from this September

FE/Skills

- **RDAs?** The think tank Localis questioned whether there was sufficient local capacity to deliver the government's Industrial Strategy calling instead for the creation of new regional bodies under local leadership as part of a new industrial compact
- **Skills survey.** The latest annual CBI/Pearson Employer Survey of the education and skills system closes next Friday with details of how employers can contribute provided under the link
- **Why us?** The Engineering body SEMTA published a commissioned report looking at the role of end point assessments (EPA) in apprenticeships concluding that England was one of the few countries to rely solely on such an approach and that most other countries studies used a range of assessments
- **Your exam starts soon.** The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) with support from J.P. Morgan, announced that it will trial new support arrangements including texting and practical activities to help post-16 year olds who need to improve their English and maths levels keep on track
- **Skills stats.** The DfE published updated stats on FE sector activity for 2015/16 and the first two quarters of 2016/17 showing a further drop in adult participation but an increase in apprenticeship starts

Schools

- **Funding scenarios.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) modelled three scenarios for transferring schools over to the new national fair funding formula suggesting that unless transitional guarantees were retained and cash freezes lifted, it could be a long and painful transition for many schools
- **View from here.** The National Governors' Association (NGA) published the results of a survey of members on school funding suggesting that while school funding reform was important and should go ahead, if it wasn't accompanied by more money, schools may have to cut teaching and support staff
- **Catchment costs.** The DfE published some analysis of the impact on house prices of being near a high-performing primary and/or secondary school suggesting that a catchment area premium still operates
- **Exam appeals.** Ofqual released the latest official data on exam appeals for last summer's exams showing a 24% drop in the number of appeals made but a 2+% increase in the number of appeals leading to a grade change
- **Behaviour in class.** The government's behaviour adviser, Tom Bennett, published a new report recommending more sophisticated collection of data, funding for specialized inclusion units and dedicated behaviour management to be included in head teacher qualifications



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- **Parents' views on homework.** The TES reported on its survey of Ofsted's Parent Panel on their views on homework finding most supportive but some concerned about the potential detrimental impact on family life and how things could be better managed generally
- **Take 5.** Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education and Skills at the OECD, listed five powerful ways (all student focus; curriculum challenge; teacher quality; school structures; community accountability) that can help transform schools, in a speech to the Global Education Forum last weekend
- **Two become one.** The NUT and ATL teacher unions announced that following a vote among members, the two unions will merge, starting from this Sept, to become the National Education Union (NEU) with the two current respective general secretaries working jointly over the following five years

Tweets(s) of the week

- "We expected to teach people for a lifetime, now we don't know what to expect anymore" - [@SchleicherOECD](#)
- "Appren system is e-bay of education system. Negotiated rates will only drive down quality...can only go one way [@aelpuk](#)" [@NickLinford](#)
- "The minute someone says teaching the internet is as important as literacy I assume they're barmy and swipe left" [@tombennett71](#)
- "Chinese maths textbooks to be translated into English for use in UK schools" - [@RichardVaughan1](#)
- "Fairer funding and sufficient funding are getting confused by many in the debate. Keep banging sufficient funding drum; MPs are hearing us" - [@HeadsRoundtable](#)

Other stories of the week

- Cos we're happy. This week saw the fifth annual publication of the World Happiness Report, timed to coincide with the UN's International Day of Happiness last Monday. It may not be one of the most subjective global surveys based as it is on a questionnaire about where you feel you are in terms of a ladder of life (an image the Skills Minister would recognize) but it is an important measure of social progress, includes other important factors and is taken seriously by many politicians. The country that came out on top in the happiness stakes was Norway followed by Denmark, Iceland and Switzerland with the UK coming in at 19th. Countries with long-standing problems such as the Central African Republic, Syria and South Sudan, tended to be at the bottom of the list

Quote(s) of the week

- "Those championing selection as the silver bullet for tackling social mobility or as the panacea for creating good new school places, are misguided" – Nick Clegg, Nicky Moran and Lucy Powell join forces to condemn the government's proposed selective school plans
- "To see such ill-judged spending being prioritized in a time of austerity is unacceptable" – school leaders express their concerns about the costs of selective schools at a time of overall school austerity
- "The myth that I think it is not helpful for anyone to sustain is that somehow there is a hermetically-sealed Whitehall refusing to engage" – the director of the Local Growth Unit aims to nail the myth that the government has gone cold on devolution deals



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- “It cannot include time spent on English and maths, or on training to acquire knowledge and skills that are not required in the standard or framework” – FE Week seeks guidance from the Skills Funding Agency on what the 20% off the job training in apprenticeships actually means
- “Given that the new formula includes a specific amount for the same factor, the continued existence of the Pupil Premium as a separate grant makes very little sense and it would be better to roll this into the main formula” – the Institute for Fiscal Studies argues that the Pupil Premium should be rolled into the new funding formula for schools
- “Is it going to take time? Yes” – the chief regulator of Ofqual on how long it’ll take the new GCSE grading scale to be understood and accepted
- “Book out the last two appointments to fictional parents to avoid the graveyard slot grabbers who won’t go home” – one of the pieces of advice sent into the TES webchat about how to survive parents’ evenings

Number(s) of the week

- 2.3%. The published inflation rate for last month, up from 1.8% in January and at its highest level for over three years with increased food and fuel prices being blamed, according to official figures
- 1978. People born after this date will be affected by the proposed changes to the state pension if the government decides to accept the recommendations published in this week’s Cridland Report
- 30%. The volume of UK jobs that could be at risk of automation by the 2030s according to a report on the economy by consultants PWC
- 10. The number of working days left from today (Friday March 24) for apprenticeship providers who weren’t approved for the apprenticeship register first time round to apply again under the second round
- 7%. The drop in the number of people training to be teachers over the last year according to UCAS data
- 8-12 days. The length of typical work placements for 17/18 year olds, according to a report from the DfE
- 33%. How many schools governors reckoned they’d have to reduce the number of subjects on offer in the light of the current funding scenario, according to a survey by the National Governors’ Association
- 355. The number exam appeals submitted for last summer’s GCSE and GCE exams, down from 466 in the previous year, according to Ofqual
- £18,600 and £15,800. How much more houses near best-performing primary and secondary schools respectively tend to cost, according to a report from the DfE
- 48 and 39. The respective ages at which men’s and women’s salaries peak according to an article in Business Insider
- £7.00. Apparently the weekly going rate for pocket money according to one out of pocket parent

What to look out for next week

- LEP Annual Conference (Monday)
- National Education Technology Conference (Tuesday, Wednesday)
- Article 50 triggered (Wednesday)