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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 3 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 hot news on twitter this week has been that the Prime Minister is giving up crisps for lent while perhaps not to be outdone, one of her Schools Ministers announced he was cutting out bread and potatoes.

Cuts of one sort or another have been much in the news this week with important reports from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) and Institute for Government (IfG) and with the Treasury launching a further cross-government efficiency review. Elsewhere this week we've had another piece in the government's post-Brexit Plan for Britain in the shape of a new 7-themed Digital Strategy, some developments around careers guidance and sex education and two key moments in the education calendar: World Book Day and National (Secondary schools) Offer Day. As ever, links below but here's some tasters.

Funding first where many people will be tuned into the Chancellor's Budget Statement next Wednesday but where the tone was perhaps set this week with the announcement that the Treasury was calling on departments to find savings of between 3% and 6% by 2019/20. So-called 'core' school budgets remain protected but as the Institute for Government outlined, we're reaching a point where cuts to public services are beginning to cause problems; 'breaking point' was the term used.

Specific details on education spending trends over recent years can be found in the Institute for Fiscal Studies report. It looks at public spending for each stage of education over the last 25 years and in fairness notes that apart from the traditional whipping boy of 16-18 provision, most stages of education have witnessed real-terms increases. But, and it's a big but, things are getting tight and further cuts are likely to affect the quality of provision, hence the alarm bells that have been ringing in recent weeks.

Limits to public spending have meant that governments have increasingly had to resort to other funding sources and one of the most striking points from the latest Digital Strategy is just how much the government is relying on business to head up digital skills training. This latest Strategy for instance lists at least 13 business-led programmes from Amazon and Apple to Samsung and Sky, some for schools, some for workplaces, some for beginners, some for experts. This sea of provision will be overseen by a new Digital Skills Partnership and forms a key feature in the Strategy's 7 elements.

Finally, a quick run through some other developments this week. On careers, moves to ensure that colleges, employers and others can get into schools and talk about post-16 options are coming to a head with a clause in the FE Bill by Lord Baker and a new backbench Bill; both will be debated in coming weeks. On sex education and PSHE, after much deliberation, the government has given the go-ahead for statutory provision albeit with caveats and further consultation on the latter. On secondary school choices, details are still coming in but against a backdrop of unease about how many families got their preferred choice.



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Top headlines this week

- 'FE funding level no higher than 30 years ago.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Restrict academy chain expansion, ministers warned.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Number of pupils offered preferred secondary places falls in most areas.' ([Wed](#))
- 'New Ofsted crackdown on schools gaming the system.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Academy chains planning pupil premium grammar schools.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Tighter squeeze](#). The Treasury confirmed that the latest Efficiency Review will look to find Dept savings of between 3% and 6% from non-protected areas by 2019/20
- [Your call is important](#). The Institute for Government and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy published a new Performance Tracker on how public services performed in five areas including schools, suggesting that in many cases pressures and tensions were building
- [Big picture on education spending](#). The Institute for Fiscal studies published a major report looking at education funding for each learning stage over time showing cuts that after a lengthy period of increases, cuts were beginning to affect schools, HE funding had shifted over almost entirely to tuition fees but FE and in particular 16-18 had suffered the biggest hits
- [Sector deals](#). Greg Clark, the BEIS Secretary, confirmed in a keynote speech to the British Chambers of Commerce, that the government intends to launch a formal framework later this year for the system of sector specific 'growth deals' that were announced in the recent Industrial Strategy
- [Digital Strategy](#). The government launched a new Digital Strategy as part of its wider post Brexit Plan for Britain with a big emphasis on developing digital skills along with enhancing digital infrastructure and supporting key digital sectors
- [AI review](#). The government announced some additional research funding and a new review into the development of artificial intelligence and robotics as part of its wider digital strategy
- [Industrial Strategy](#). The BEIS Committee reported on its review of the government's recent Industrial Strategy calling for clearer metrics, a cross dept implementation unit and less of a focus on sector specifics
- [Diversity in the workplace](#). The McGregor-Smith Review published its report calling on workplaces to support greater BME workplace progression arguing that it could help increase GDP by 1.3% pa
- [Another Dyson](#). Sir James Dyson announced plans to open up a second R/D centre in the UK on the site of an old airbase in Wiltshire

HE

- [Brexit on HE](#). The Education Committee confirmed it will hold a third regional session next week on the potential impact of Brexit on HE, hosted this time in Northumbria and focused on universities in Scotland and the North



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- **Literature reviews.** The DfE published detailed literature reviews covering opportunities, benefits and challenges for accelerated degrees and credit transfer processes in higher ed
- **HE income and expenditure.** The HE Stats Agency (HESA) published detailed breakdowns of income and expenditure for HE providers for 2015/16 showing total sector income of £34.7bn
- **Putting the pieces together.** The university think tank million+ published a report highlighting the importance of universities in helping pull together different government strategies on devolution, industry and growth at a local level
- **The hunt is over.** Sally Hunt was returned as general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU) by 59% of votes cast

FE/Skills

- **#SaveOurAdultEducation.** FE Week launched a Westminster campaign to save adult ed, calling on the government to do three things: write off loans debts where providers go bust; consult on a new adult ed strategy; and introduce maintenance grants for adult learners
- **IfA response.** Ofqual submitted its response to the Institute for Apprenticeships' Operational Plan raising a number of concerns about assessment and external quality control and offering to share its expertise
- **Collab Value.** The Collab Group (CG) launched a new report peppered with big numbers showing the economic value and benefits that CG colleges generate, including notably £33bn for the UK economy

Schools

- **Roll up the MAT.** The Education Committee published its report into multi-academy trusts (MATs) raising a number of issues about their performance and expansion and recommending among other things that high-performing local authorities should be allowed to set up their own MATs
- **SRE and PSHE.** The Education Secretary confirmed in a Written Statement to Parliament that age-appropriate sex education and, following consultation, PSHE will become statutory in all schools in England from Sept 2019
- **Funding wish list.** The National Association of Head teachers and the Governors' Association published an open letter to the Chancellor spelling out 7 ways to help schools cope with a funding shortfall including: reversing cuts to the Education Services Grant and protecting per-pupil funding in real terms
- **Challenge the impossible.** Teach First released a new report indicating that pupils from deprived backgrounds tended to be served by weaker schools and launching a new 'challenge' campaign to help break through what it called 'the class ceiling' as a result
- **Widening gap.** The Social Mobility Commission published research from LKMCo and Education Datalab showing that progress gains made by disadvantaged pupils in primary tends to get lost in secondary leaving attainment gaps widening rather than narrowing as a result
- **Post-16 options.** Labour MP Nic Daikin introduced a Ten Minute Rule Bill aimed at ensuring pupils in schools in England received impartial careers advice from colleges, training providers and elsewhere so that they were fully aware of the wide range of post-16 options
- **School-work transition.** The Baker Dearing Trust published a report focused particularly on STEM skills suggesting that these and their relationship with the world of work were poorly understood in schools and claiming that the UTC experience offered a better alternative



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- **Give yourself the Edge.** The Edge Foundation and NFER launched a new online tool to help schools and colleges work more closely with employers
- **Language guidance.** The government published responses to consultation and guidance on GCSE and A' level languages
- **Made in Wales.** The OECD ran its eyes over the curriculum reform plans for Wales giving it the thumbs up but urging the Welsh government to continue to invest, particularly in supporting school leaders and not to keep adding other elements to the plan but stick with the core essentials

Tweets(s) of the week

- “Hell of a lot more votes in bringing back night schools than grammar schools” - [@LWShane](#)
- “Schools still get the headlines but the big message from the new ifs report is the scale of cuts to FE” [@PJTheEconomist](#)
- “Kudos for whoever came up with the hashtag @schoolsjustwannahavefunds” - [@MrMichaelShaw](#)
- “Area review process ends in 4 weeks after 37 reviews, 185 steering groups and around 50 merger recommendations” [@ AoC_info](#)
- “Government attacked for pub economics in English HE [@JMorganTHE reports](#)” - [@timeshighered](#)

Definitions of the week

- 6 characteristics of high performing MATs. This week the Education Committee published the results of its Inquiry into multi-academy trusts (MATs.) Much of the report was written around what it felt to be the six key features of high-performing MATs. For reference purposes, these include: a gradual approach to expansion; a shared vision across the trust; robust financial controls; transparent accountability; enhanced opportunities for staff CPD; a constant commitment to improve
- 5 asks. In a speech to business leaders this week, the Director-General of the CBI, Carolyn Fairbairn listed five questions that need to be asked of the government’s recent Industrial Strategy. They include: what will success look like 5,10,15 years from now; how will success be defined; will all sectors have to deal with the government or just some; what’s the real focus; will the government stick with it?

Quote(s) of the week

- “We’ve taken our time getting it right” – the Culture Secretary launches the UK Digital Strategy
- “Sometimes in education there is a tendency to give people the benefit of the doubt too often” – Lord Nash offers his thoughts on the differences between the worlds of education and business
- “At least once a year” – how many times colleges should come into schools and talk to pupils about options according to Lord Baker
- “There are only so many financial efficiencies a school can find before reaching breaking point” – head teachers and governors write to the Chancellor ahead of next week’s Budget
- “A 6.5% real-terms cut would be the biggest real-terms fall in school spending per pupil for at least the last 30 years” – the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) reports on spending trends for schools



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- “In summary, 16-18 education spending has clearly been the relative loser from education spending changes over the last 25 years” – the IFS from the same report
- “It’s clear that the current responsibilities and accountabilities within the apprenticeship system are blurred” – Ofqual responds to the Institute for Apprenticeships Operational Plan
- “In short it’s a mug’s game at times of change in qualifications and should be avoided” – Ofsted’s Sean Harford blogs about the dangers of relying on predicted grades
- “I say to councilors they should stop trying to sell the north on the basis of Brontes and sheep. They have to persuade people there’s a moral purpose” – Sir Nick Weller (adviser on Northern schools) on the importance of attracting high-quality staff to other geographical regions, in this case - the North
- “Home has become even more of a classroom than it ever was” – Michael Rosen reflects on the fact that increasing amounts of homework are helping widen rather than narrow the attainment gap

Number(s) of the week

- 4.5% (of national income.) Government spend on education, the second largest area of UK public spending, according to a new report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 1.2m. How many more digitally skilled people will be needed by 2022 to meet future skill needs according to the government’s new digital strategy
- £654 bn. How much the development of artificial intelligence could add to the UK economy by 2035 according to consultants Accenture
- £16.8bn. The income from HE tuition fees in 2015/16 according to data from the HE Stats Agency
- £5.2bn. The return on public investment generated by learners at Collab Group colleges according to a new report for the Group
- 36. How many colleges are now in the Collab Group
- £45,700. How much more property can cost in a top school catchment area according to research from the Sutton Trust
- ½ a GCSE grade less. The extent of the attainment gap in core subjects experienced by disadvantaged pupils, according to research from the Social Mobility Commission
- £415M. How much schools are to get from the so-called sugar tax for improved facilities and/or healthier living programmes, according to an update from the government

What to look out for next week

- National Apprenticeship Week
- National Careers Week
- Education Committee witness session on Brexit and HE (Tuesday)
- Budget Day (Wednesday)