



Pearson

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 6 April 2018

(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

No policy briefing last week so plenty of education action to catch up on from over the last two weeks.

The most eye-catching headlines include in no particular order: the launch of a new Social Mobility Pledge, the arrival of one new agency and the first birthday of another, the publication of three important new reports and two useful corporate plans, the start of the new national funding formula for schools albeit in soft form, and a busy weekend of teacher union conferences. Here's some details.

Social mobility first which remains very much a touchstone for the government often fuelled by the PM's so-called 'burning injustices.' While the government deliberates about the future of the Social Mobility Commission, the former Education Secretary, Justine Greening, has seized the initiative by getting a number of major companies to sign up as Social Mobility Employers. The Pledge involves them committing to work with schools and colleges offering work experience, careers advice and open recruitment. The webpage with details is [here](#).

Next the latest agency shuffle which this week saw the Office for Students (OfS) formally take its place as the new independent regulator for HE in England and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) reach its first birthday as a single funding body. We'll hear more about the latter in its forthcoming annual report but for the moment, most eyes will be on the OfS, already facing a mound of expectations and a sector under scrutiny. The Chief Executive heralded the arrival of the OfS with a [blog](#) outlining their top five priorities but it's the presence of that little preposition 'for,' as in Office for Students, that remains telling.

On to those three big reports and two useful corporate plans. The two plans came from Ofqual and the Children's Commissioner respectively each highlighting some important objectives for the coming year. Amongst those for [Ofqual](#) is further work on the system of setting exam grade boundaries while the [Children's Commissioner](#) included a promise to look at the system of pupil 'off-rolling.'

As for those three big reports, each came from important areas of Parliamentary Committee work. The Public Accounts Committee [reported](#) on its review of Academy accounts raising eyebrows at some of the salaries and commissioning practices involved. The Work and Pensions Committee [reported](#) on the European Social Fund, a valuable fund for skills and adult learning, and told the government to get on and sort out a successor scheme while the Migration Advisory Committee [published](#) an absorbing interim update on its evidence gathered so far about the use of EU migrant labour and future policy concerns.

Finally those Easter Union Conferences, challenging as ever and helpfully summarised by the TES [here](#).

Policy Eye

Week ending Friday 6 April 2018



Pearson

Top headlines this week

- ‘Teachers vow to oppose introduction of baseline assessments.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Labour launches National Education Service consultation.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Launch of apprenticeship levy transfer limited to one employer.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Record proportion of sixth formers apply to higher education.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘England needs 47,000 extra secondary teachers.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [UK labour market](#). The Migration Advisory Committee reported on the numerous responses it had received as part of its work for government on assessing the impact of Brexit on the UK labour market, highlighting the increase in EEA workers since 2004 but also why many employers turn to them to fill gaps, ahead of government plans to craft a post - Brexit immigration policy
- [Taking the Pledge](#). Former Education Secretary Justine Greening led the launch of a new ‘Social Mobility Pledge,’ which will see businesses and others partnering with schools and colleges to provide careers advice and work experience to help improve career prospects for young people especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- [Filling the ESF gap](#). The Work and Pensions Committee published its report into the European Social Fund (ESF,) an important source of learning and skills support funding for many communities, urging the government to get on and design a successor scheme
- [A National Education Service](#). The Labour Party moved to develop further its concept of a National Education Service (NES) ‘free at the point of use,’ by launching a national consultation on the key principles intended to define the Service
- [Latest Business Plan](#). The Children’s Commissioner outlined the themes that will shape her work over the coming year including off-rolling, home education, safeguarding and digital children along with the experiences of children in other settings
- [Stop Start](#). The Sutton Trust published a commissioned report looking at what’s happening to Sure Start Children’s Centres concluding that although the definition of such centres varies, increasing numbers have been closing or merging provision and calling on the government to undertake its promised review
- [Ada Lovelace Institute](#). The Nuffield Foundation announced the launch of a new independent Institute, named after the celebrated 19thc mathematician, which will research and report on some of the wider ethical and social issues arising out of the use of AI, data and algorithms

HE

- [Prevent remit](#). The Education Secretary formally handed over the Prevent duty ‘baton’ from HEFCE to the incoming Office for Students calling on it to consider adopting a more risk-based approach and to report regularly from June 2018
- [Speaking freely](#). Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights reported on its inquiry into freedom of speech at universities concluding that it didn’t find things quite as dramatic as some of the media had



Pearson

suggested but calling for a review of the Prevent guidance and for the incoming Office for Students to monitor developments

- **Top priorities.** Nicola Dandridge, chief executive of the Office for Students (OfS,) outlined the top five priorities for the organization including tackling disadvantage, listening to students and value for money as it formally took its place as the new body for higher education
- **Latest UCAS stats.** UCAS published its latest set of stats on UK HE entry 2018, reflecting the picture as of the late March deadline, showing record numbers of applications from English 18 yr olds and increases in applications from the EU and overseas but a continuing decline in applications from older UK students
- **Widening Participation.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new briefing by Professor Iain Martin, V.C. at Anglia Ruskin in which he analyzed widening participation data using a new combination measure that resulted in some of the highest ranking universities ending up lower down the social equality scale and some of the less prestigious universities at the higher end of the scale
- **Making the grade.** The Times education correspondent highlighted the continuing issue of the growing numbers of university students gaining first-class degrees noting an increase even among those who entered with modest A' level grades
- **Changing the Culture.** Universities UK reported on what progress had been made in tackling sexual misconduct and hate crime one year on from its original report, noting that many things had improved particularly when senior leaders took a leading role
- **Dead or Alive?** Rolin Moe, Director of the Institute for Academic Innovation at Seattle Pacific University, examined the health of MOOCs (Massive Open online Courses) in a blog on the Wonkhe website, suggesting that although MOOCs had failed to reach their potential the concept of different learning platforms remained live

FE/Skills

- **Commissioner's role.** The Skills Minister outlined the key responsibilities and outcome measures for the FE Commissioner and his team in the coming year with the emphasis remaining on quality improvement and financial sustainability
- **Cost-effective apprenticeship model?** The Education Policy Institute examined the Swiss model of apprenticeship training to see what lessons might be learned for developments in England concluding that apprenticeships need to be longer and start at an earlier age and that smaller firms need greater support
- **Staff numbers.** The Education and Training Foundation published its annual data report on the FE sector workforce showing an increase in zero hour contracts and decline in staff numbers generally over the last year
- **Latest Sector Deal.** The government announced its latest Sector Deal, this time with the Creative Industries which will see match funding from government to the tune of £150m and the creation of a new Cultural Development Fund
- **Flexible Learning Fund.** The government listed the names of the 32 successful bidders who will receive funding from the Flexible Learning Fund, which was first announced in last year's Spring Budget and which will support innovative adult learning projects



Pearson

- **More levy lessons.** The Institute of Directors (IoD) published the results of its latest survey of employer views on the apprenticeship levy showing that only around 30% of those surveyed fully understand it and half that number believe it's fit for purpose
- **It's all a myth.** Ofsted published its latest set of myths about what it is and isn't looking for in college inspections in terms of learning practice
- **FAB appointment.** The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) announced that it had appointed Tom Bewick, former skills adviser and a leading figure on skills policy as its new Chief Executive

Schools

- **Academy accounts.** The Public Accounts Committee reported on its review of Academy accounts, welcoming the fact that they were now being specifically published but raising concerns about some of the high levels of salaries and business arrangements found amongst the accounts
- **Ofqual plans.** Ofqual published its Corporate Plan for the next three years outlining a range of objectives including looking at how grade boundaries are set, deterring malpractice, introducing reformed functional skills and reviewing fees for vocational qualifications
- **Doing the maths.** The government outlined the procedure for encouraging the more selective universities to open a free maths schools for 16-19 yr olds as part of a wider drive to raise standards and participation in maths
- **Left behind.** The Children's Commissioner reported on the challenges facing many children growing up in the North of England who often start school behind where they should be and fail to catch up let alone complete programmes before they reach 18
- **There's a machine for that.** Ofsted outlined a new two-stage process for assessing whether good and outstanding schools needed inspecting in which the first stage uses what's termed 'supervised machine learning,' in effect an algorithm that combs and codifies required data
- **Apple for teacher.** Apple pitched for a stronger foray into the classroom with the launch of a new iPad and range of software including an app that enables teachers to create and track assignments as the market for education tools hots up

Tweets(s) of the week

- "We've pressed go. The Office for Students website is now live with lots of information for students and staff alike" - [@officestudents](#)
- "I always say to children – don't look at your iPhone, the whiteboard or a computer, just stare out of the window, let your mind wander and think about what you can see" - [@GuardianTeach](#)
- "If we can get our students agreeing with Pride and Prejudice's Elizabeth Bennet and feeling 'I am excessively diverted,' we will have done our job, says [@ipryce](#)" - [@tesfeneews](#)
- "Young people's happiness levels sink to lowest in a decade, via [@tes](#)" - [@wstewarttes](#)

Other stories of the week

- Another Education Act. The respected education commentator Sir Tim Brighouse offered some thoughts on the state of the school system in England in a comment piece in The Guardian this week in which

Policy Eye

Week ending Friday 6 April 2018



Pearson

he called for a new 'radical' Education Act to help schools manage in the 21stc. He outlined five 'systemic structural issues' facing schools currently including: teacher recruitment and retention; a balanced curriculum; governance and accountability; admissions arrangements; and social mobility and the funding deficit. A link to the article is [here](#)

- Sheets to the wind. Paul Greatrix, Registrar at the University of Nottingham, looked at the issue of student welfare and in particular student sleeping habits, or at least those suitable for public consumption, in a comment piece on Wonkhe this week. One of the reveals was that apparently in America, one practice is the use of disposable sheets, compostable after a couple of weeks and said to aid student health, welfare and sleeping habits. Perhaps no further comment is needed but a link to the article is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "The simple answer is because they are the best available candidates" – the Migration Advisory Committee examines why employers recruit workers from Europe
- "I learnt a lot from that and it did cause some reputational damage" – Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students responds to Committee questions on the Toby Young appointment
- "I believe that one day there will truly fair access and it has been my pleasure and my pride to play a part in making that happen" – Les Ebdon departs the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) with head held high
- "It is now so easy to get a first that what was once a rare accolade has almost become meaningless" – Professor Alan Smithers comments on the relentless rise in first-class honours degrees
- "I cry - literally cry - when I go into schools and they just keep on being given comprehension exercises because they know that the reading test has comprehension in it" – Ofsted national director Sean Harford indicates what makes him weep
- "Unless you live with a teacher or know a teacher, you do not understand what it's like. It's not an 8.30 to 3.30 job" Andria Zafirakou, who recently won the prize as the world's best teacher, reminds people of how hard the job can be
- "I can't let you in unless you're excited" – the greeting for guests arriving at Apple's launch of its new educational products (in Chicago)

Number(s) of the week

- £7.83. The new rate for the National Living Wage from 1 April, up from £7.50, according to a new statement from the government
- £500m. The amount of money available each year through the European Social Fund (ESF) to help with training and skills support and which needs replacing according to a report by the DWP Committee
- £32,100. The median pay for teaching staff in colleges, down slightly on the previous year, according to data from the Education and Training Foundation
- £17.7m. The budget for Ofqual for 2018/19 according to figures in its latest Corporate Plan
- 590,270. The number of people who have applied to UK HE courses so far this year, a slight (2%) drop on the same point last year but still high, according to the latest stats from UCAS



Pearson

- 194,100. The number of apprenticeship starts so far this (academic) year, a drop of 25% compared to the same period the year before according to latest government statistics
- £514m. The amount of money the government is allocating to improve and expand school buildings including £38m from the Soft Drinks Levy to help with kitchen and sports facilities, according to the DfE
- 0.004%. How many of the 6.6m qualification grades awarded last summer were changed following an appeal, according to latest figures from Ofqual
- 1.1m. The number of children living in workless households at the end of last year, according to latest data from the DWP
- 25.2%. The percentage of 10-15 yr old girls who had quarreled with their mother more than once a week in 2015/16 (down 5% on previous data and still lower than boys at 26.3%) according to data from the Understanding Society survey reported by the TES

What to look out for next week

- Advance Notice for Tuesday April 17. Pearson College hosts a Centre for Industry Engagement seminar on 'The Purpose of a University,' with doors open from 18.30. Panelists including Lord Willetts, Carl Lygo (former V.C. BPP,) Wendy Piatt (former D.G Russell Group) and Roxanne Stockwell (Principal, Pearson Colleges.) Registration and details [here](#)