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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 23 February 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 prizes for guessing this week's top news story or for Wonkhe for labelling it 'Derby Day.' The Prime Minister's speech at Derby College at the start of the week in which she pressed the button on the long awaited funding review of post-18 provision is an important policy moment.

There've been other important developments this week including: the Treasury Committee's report on Student Loans, the NAO's report on academy conversions, HEPI's paper on differential fees, the Skills Commission's report on the skills system, and Ofqual's latest qualifications market report. And among all of that has been the build up to next week's World Book Day with interesting thoughts on what to wear, who's reading what and how reading habits are or aren't changing. A reminder perhaps of timeless pleasures.

But it's that funding review that's been hogging the headlines and which provides most of the commentary. There's been excellent coverage all week of both the speech and the review itself by among others: Wonkhe, the Times Higher, Universities UK and the HE Policy Institute so, as we reach the end of the week what's emerging as the key issues?

Arguably there are four. First, as HEPI's Nick Hillman suggested, expectations are high, perhaps too high. The PM listed four concerns in her speech including the fact that the system is too expensive and that a competitive market hasn't emerged; the official remit lists four issues covering value for money, choice and competition, meeting skill needs, and ensuring access, while sceptics have suggested a lot of it's to do with political survival. A lot therefore hangs on it all and there will be tensions. Second, it's a wide-ranging review taking in post-18 provision and what the PM called: 'a system of tertiary education that works for all our young people.' The ambition is commendable but has proved difficult in the past. Already the skills system is subject to an Action Plan, Industrial Strategy and host of other initiatives which could prove difficult to align. As Alison Wolf herself has indicated in the past, the issue has as much to do with funding as anything else. That takes us on to the third issue. A loosening of the burden on funding be it fees, interest rates, or maintenance grants are what many people are after but are the review panel's hands already tied? There was little give on any of these in the speech and as the terms of reference indicate: 'recommendations must be consistent with the government's fiscal policies.' Finally, will the timescale work? It's quite lengthy and may traverse, not least in its final report date, that other policy elephant, namely Brexit?

As for those other developments this week, the Treasury Committee's report on Student Loans and the NAO report on academy conversions lift the lid on the costs and challenges of two key areas of government policy. Student voice has been strong this week on university strikes, differential fees and work experience: no, no and yes, is the verdict in that order. And finally, Harry Potter still tops school Book Clubs.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Theresa May's university review will not scrap fees.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Three grammar schools approach DfE about opening up annexes.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Students want work experience back in the curriculum.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Top UK universities disrupted by strike over pensions.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Fat cat Academy bosses face challenge over pay.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Launch of the post-18 funding review](#). The PM launched the government's long-awaited major funding review of post-18 provision listing four key questions for it to consider
- [Terms of reference](#). The government published the terms of reference and key principles that will guide the independent panel leading the funding review
- [No spring cleaning](#). The FT reported on the Chancellor's Spring Statement, now just three weeks away, suggesting it may include some useful consultations and pointers for the future with updates on the latest economic forecasts, but will generally be a low-key affair with no tax changes or spending details
- [Jeremy Corbyn speech to the EEF Conference](#). The Labour leader addressed the National Manufacturing Conference where he pledged that a future Labour government would prioritize vocational education, apprenticeships and digital skills as part of its proposed National Education Service
- [Millennial troubles](#). The Resolution Foundation published its latest report from its ongoing Intergenerational Commission showing that millennials in the UK (those in their early '30's) have fared badly compared to previous generations when it comes to improvements in incomes, employment and home ownership
- [Social media inquiry](#). The Science and Technology Committee announced that it was launching a new inquiry into the impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health, and calling for evidence to be submitted by 6 April

HE

- [The funding review in perspective](#). Wonkhe uploaded a useful series of articles and comment pieces covering all aspects of the funding review
- [The Greening view](#). Former Education Secretary Justine Greening offered her thoughts on a reformed funding system for HE which would include maintenance grants, the creation of a dedicated HE Fund, employer contributions and banded funding, in one of a number of articles on the funding review on the Times Higher site
- [Open goals?](#) Universities UK listed five goals that the funding review should try and aim to achieve including: raising rather than limiting aspirations; alleviating funding concerns; ensuring value for money; ensuring informed decisions; and supporting learners to reach their full potential



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- [Student Loans](#). The Treasury Committee reported on its inquiry into the student loan system questioning the management, the rising costs, the unfair interest rates, the lack of market completion and overall accounting procedures of the current system
- [The murky world of student loans](#). Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal studies (IfS) explained the arcane rules behind the operation of the student loan system which for example ensure that the loans do not appear on the government's deficit ledger
- [What should students pay?](#) Radio 4 presenter John Humphreys outlined the issues on tuition fees and other costs in a comment piece on YouGov and in the light of the latest review, called for others to offer their thoughts
- [Horses for courses?](#) The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) reported on the current 'hot' topic of different fee levels for different courses, noting that it's an idea that's been around for some time, that there's little agreement about how it should apply, that it already exists to some extent within the UK and that, basically proponents should be careful what they wish for
- [Look East](#). Study.EU published its 2018 ranking of top European countries for students wishing to study abroad with Germany and the UK remaining as first and second choices respectively, France and Russia moving up the list but with a noticeable increase in the number of European institutions offering courses in English seemingly as an alternative for students post-Brexit
- [On Track](#). UK Rail announced a new high-level partnership between the rail industry and eight universities to create four Centres of Excellence covering digital systems, infrastructure, stock and support

FE/Skills

- [Apprenticeship funding](#). FE Week reported that the government is considering looking again at the apprenticeship funding bands because the current model is not encouraging sufficient price negotiation by employers
- [Re-balancing act](#). The Chief Exec of the Association of Colleges called for a better balance between the funding and support for HE and that available for FE in a response to the government's post-18 funding review and its remit to look across the whole tertiary sector
- [A different transition debate](#). Ian Pretty, chief exec of the Collab Group of colleges, wrote a comment piece for the TES on the need for transition programmes for those not yet ready for T levels and pointing to the work that member colleges were doing in this area
- [16-19 funding](#). The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published further explanatory documents for schools and colleges showing how their allocations for 2018/19 will be calculated

Schools

- [The cost of conversion](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) reported on its inquiry into the costs and effects of converting schools into academies concluding that it remains a time-consuming, costly and challenging business particularly when it involves underperforming or small primary schools requiring a sponsor and the DfE needs to be clearer about its approach in the future
- [Market Report](#). Ofqual published its latest Annual Qualifications Market Report covering the 2016/17 academic year with a batch of statistics on the numbers and types of qualifications listed and achieved, along with market shares and trends for the year



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- [What Kids are Reading](#). The latest annual report, published ahead of World Book Day, listed a number of familiar favourites among the choices by children but called on schools to set aside dedicated reading time and encourage young people to consider more challenging books particular given the drop in reading enthusiasm beyond Year 7
- [Data dumps](#). The DfE outlined a set of principles intended to help improve the presentation and format of the various sets of statistics that it publishes
- [The right people around the table](#). The National Governance Association updated its guidance on recruiting, retaining and evaluating school governors and trustees
- [Teacher turnover](#). Professor Becky Allen and Sam Sims from UCL's Institute of Education applied a new statistical technique to look at the issue of teacher turnover and whether this was more prevalent in some schools than others, concluding that it is restricted to a small number of schools and that better support would help avoid cost and wastage generally
- [Bring back work experience](#). The Career Colleges Trust published research showing that a large majority of teenagers would like to see work experience brought back as a compulsory component of the school curriculum
- [SBP networks](#). The government published simple guidance for schools and others on the creation of School Professional Business networks which can be useful in sharing information and developing outside links
- [Pay attention at the back](#). Education 'expert' Daisy Christodoulou outlined in a comment piece in the TES some of the challenges facing teachers as they compete with smartphones and apps for pupil attention, arguing that it's time to beat them at their own game
- [Sleep over](#). 'Sleep researchers' from the Universities of Aberdeen, Birmingham and Oxford became the latest to launch a research project into the effects of starting school late and what impact this might have on teenagers' performance
- [Teacher supply and mobility](#) The DfE reported on local recruitment, retention and mobility rates as part of its series analyzing the teacher workforce

Tweets(s) of the week

- "The only thing that makes me miss being a student is talk of 'reading week.' I'd like a reading year" - [@Sathnam](#)
- "Tuition fees are such a news lightning rod. More than 1,900 people have commented on this story today. High ratio to the million or so who will have read it. Theresa May's university review will not scrap fees." - [@seanjcoughlan](#)
- "The argument about parity of esteem between academic and technical education is pointless. If we develop world class technical qualifications, esteem will naturally follow." - [@NickBoles](#)
- "After today's [@Apprenticeships](#)' data, we reckon 180,000 starts a quarter are needed to hit [@educationgovuk](#) 3m target compared with actual 110,000 starts last quarter" - [@AELPUK](#)
- "My children being asked to make poster drives me up the wall. Why do teachers set it as homework? Where do all these posters go?" - [@trussliz](#)
- "Jenny Lee: I used to have common sense. Now I have mobile apps" - [@FT](#)



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Other stories of the week

- Surviving World Book Day. Next week sees the latest World Book Day when many younger children dress up as a character from a well-known book. It's not the only activity taking place on that day, the official World Book Day website lists lots of useful ideas and resources, but dressing up is a traditional activity. This can often be quite stressful for those called on to make the costumes but for anyone sweating it out in such a situation, Mumsnet has ridden to the rescue with a host of ideas. Some are quite simple, for example they list six characters, such as Sophie in the BFG, who just need pyjamas. A link to the full set of 73 different costume ideas can be found [here](#).
- 'Pad kid poured curd pulled cod.' Not quite sure what it means but according to researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, this is the most difficult tongue twister in the English language. Others include: 'How can a clam cram in a clean cream can?' The full list of some 14 challenging tongue twisters with no 'she sells sea shells on the sea shore' in sight can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "It's only fair" – the Prime Minister argues that those who benefit from their education should contribute directly to it as she launches the higher education funding review
- "The truth is that technical education has always been seen as the poor sibling of university, both by policymakers and cabinet ministers who want their own children to follow in their footsteps and see a degree as the only route to success" – David Lammy MP on the realities of parity of esteem
- "High-flying lawyers will generally pay less than teachers (in student loan interest rates) but both will pay more than a graduate who does not receive a pay premium from their time in higher education" – the Treasury Committee highlights some of the iniquities in the current student loan system
- "It's such a huge amount of money that it doesn't really feel very real at the moment" – a 3rd year university student reflects on how her student debt feels
- "I think workload is a significant issue for teachers and I'm determined to do everything that we can on that" – Damian Hind signals teacher workload as a priority in an interview on the Marr Show
- "I would hope that by September to see some real numbers" – the Skills Minister hopes to see a burst in apprenticeship starts later this year
- "It is unclear how feasible it will be for the department to continue converting large numbers of schools to academies" – the head of the National Audit Office introduces his Office's report on converting schools to academies
- "You have to have high levels of trust" – the chief exec of an exam board on some of the challenges of moving to a computer-based testing system
- "As Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, I am proud to say that we will provide the full £14bn that is needed to bring all schools up to a good standard" – Angela Rayner confirms that Labour will invest in sprinklers and cladding removal to ensure that all school buildings in future are safe



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- “They have been overwhelmed by a strange combination of fictional sit-com characters, reality TV and social media stars, who paint a picture of perfection to be achieved” – the head of a leading independent schools urges young people to face the realities rather than the fiction of modern life

Number(s) of the week

- 4.4%. The UK unemployment rate for the final quarter of 2017, up a slight 0.1%, according to latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 150,000. How many construction jobs, largely in managerial and carpentry roles, will be created over the next five years, according to the latest figures from the Construction Industry Board (CITB)
- £19.3bn. How much education related exports and related activity, largely from HE, earned for the UK in 2015, according to the latest data from the government
- 44%. The number of people who said if they were 18 now they would choose to take another career path rather than university, according to a poll by You Gov
- 350,000. The number of undergraduate degrees awarded last year with only 16,000 people gaining them through FE, according to data quoted in her speech by the PM
- 63%. The percentage of students who don't support different fees for different courses, according to a survey by the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- 575,000. The number of teaching hours that may well be lost over the next month if the strike by university staff over pension rights goes ahead, according to the University and College Union (UCU)
- 11. The number of institutions now in the Chartered Institution for FE, according to the CIFE
- £81m. How much the DfE spent on converting schools to academies in 2016/17, according to a new report from the National Audit Office (NAO)
- 12.4m. How many exam certificates were issued in England over the last academic year, according to the latest market report from Ofqual
- 83%. The number of young people who would like to see work experience re-introduced to the school curriculum, according to a survey by the Career Colleges Trust
- 38%. The number of secondary schools in England that have cut the amount of timetabled PE time for their 14-16 year olds, according to research from the Youth Sport Trust

What to look out for next week

- Ofqual Awarding Organisations' Conference (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on apprenticeship and skills training (Tuesday)
- BEIS Committee witness session on the Industrial Strategy (Wednesday)
- AELP Spring Conference (Wednesday)
- World Book Day (Thursday)