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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 16 March 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

Lots going on this week but four big stories dominate: the Chancellor's Spring Statement; the issue of teacher workloads; proposals for integrated communities; and a rush of reports on HE.

The [Spring Statement](#) first where for the world of education at least, one word stood out and that was the word 'if.' It occurred half way through the Chancellor's 26 minute Statement when he declared that if the economic indicators continue to prove positive by the autumn, then he'd look to put more money into the public finances. It could be a big 'if.' Despite the Chancellor sounding upbeat and suggesting there was light at the end of the tunnel, the picture in the accompanying [report](#) by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) was mixed. Yes, inflation and borrowing were likely to improve but the structural deficit remains high with growth modest at best. The Institute for Fiscal Studies as ever has an excellent [summary](#) of it all.

As the Chancellor had been at pains to point out, the Statement was not an occasion for big announcements but there were a few interesting headlines for education. The top one was the release of £80m to help small businesses take on apprentices, along with consultation on self-funded training. Elsewhere, work is under way to scale up the National Retraining Scheme while T levels continue to get the big build-up. As for funding that'll have to wait until this year's Autumn Budget or next year's Spending Review, or perhaps both to see if there really is light at the end of the tunnel.

Next teacher workloads, a core theme at last weekend's ASCL Conference where the Education Secretary, Chief Inspector and ASCL general-secretary came together in an exclusive session to address the issue. In his [speech](#), the Education Secretary outlined seven pledges ranging from a review of regional accountability arrangements to avoiding further curriculum changes during this Parliament. Amanda Spielman equally committed [Ofqual](#) to do its bit while Geoff Barton [acknowledged](#) that some solutions were in their own hands. As the DfE's [update](#) indicates, the Workload Challenge remains a high priority.

Third, integrating communities, where following the recent Casey report, the government has set out its own proposals in a consultative [Green Paper](#). The important role that education providers play features prominently among the 36 proposals with recommendations on supporting British values and safeguarding other education settings in schools, to a new strategy for ESOL and community-based English language programmes for adult education. The funding for many, however, has yet to match the ambition.

Finally, it's been another busy week for HE. Apart from the launch of the latest consultation on the quality of teaching and learning at a subject level, there's been an outbreak of reports on such matters as the decline in part-time and mature students, value for money and more optimistically, a growth in demand.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Degree courses to be rated gold, silver and bronze.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘FE’s sector financial health is deteriorating, AoC warns.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Teachers who help set up exams face tough new regulations.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘University place demand to grow by 300,000 by 2030.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Number of secondary schools in deficit has trebled.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Light at the end of the tunnel](#). The Chancellor spied light at the end of the tunnel when he outlined his Spring Statement to MPs on Tuesday suggesting that he might be able to inject extra funds into public finances in the Budget later this year and would conduct a major Spending Review next year
- [Economic and Fiscal Outlook](#). The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its latest outlook Paper on the economy, timed to accompany the Chancellor’s Spring Statement and hinting at slightly more momentum in the short-term but with concerns about growth and the deficit in the longer-term
- [Integrated Communities](#). The Government issued a consultative Green Paper on developing integrated communities, building on the Casey report with a little pot of money and a range of proposals covering housing, local opportunities, schools and English Language provision, focused initially on five ‘Integration Areas’
- [Struggling with the maths](#). Researchers from UCL and Cambridge University published the results of their analysis of the OECD’s 2011 international assessment of adult financial literacy skills showing that in many countries, notably England, Spain and Italy, adults struggle with quite basic financial questions with a quarter – a third unable to work out the change they should receive in a shop
- [Millennial railcards](#). The government launched a trial of the millennial railcards, which offer 30% off train travel for 26-30 yr olds and which were promised in the last Budget, but only on a ‘first - come first - served basis’ to the first 10,000 who sign up, leading to concerns that a lot of young people will miss out and that the government is not fully committed to the scheme
- [Healthy ageing](#). The government announced it was investing £300m into a range of projects and initiatives including those on early diagnosis and dementia which come under the Healthy Ageing Grand Challenge, one of the four Grand Challenges identified in the Industrial Strategy

HE

- [Going for gold](#). The HE Minister launched a consultation exercise on the metrics to be used to rate teaching quality and outcomes at a subject level in English universities, potentially via a new app, from 2019/2020
- [Demand for Higher Education](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new report looking at demand for higher education over the next decade and painting a positive picture with changes in demography and participation likely to fuel demand potentially to some 300,000 extra students but with issues like Brexit, funding and reputation likely to remain defining factors



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- **Forgotten Learners.** The Million Plus group reported on its survey of mature students, those aged 21 and over, where particularly among part-time students numbers have been declining, calling on the government to consider restoring maintenance grants and offer better targeted support generally, in an effort to reverse falling recruitment trends
- **Lost in space.** The Sutton Trust published its report into the decline in part-time students in England, written by Professor Claire Callender and suggesting that some 40% of the decline since 2010 has been caused by the fees issue and calling also among other things for the return of the maintenance loan as well as for the issue to be tackled as part of the post-18 funding review
- **Pro bono.** The independent HE consultancy, Viewforth, published the results of its survey into just how much voluntary and generally unpaid extracurricular work is undertaken by higher ed staff, both teaching and non-teaching, suggesting that scaled up, this could amount to over £3bn a year
- **Value for money.** The Office for Students reported on its research, led by a group of Student Unions, into what value for money actually means from a student perspective, concluding that it covered a number of things but principally the quality of teaching, assessment and learning resources as well as a commitment to greater transparency generally
- **Over to you.** Professor Gill Evans reflected in a blog on the wonkhe website, on the forthcoming transition from HEFCE to the OfS (Office for Students) and what this suggests about regulation in HE

FE/Skills

- **Deteriorating.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) outlined the position on college finances ahead of the Chancellor's Spring Statement pointing to a deteriorating picture in some colleges amid continued high inflation, increased pension costs and recruitment issues
- **ESOL.** The government made a number of proposals to beef up English language provision in its latest Green Paper on integrating communities, including setting up a new network of regional coordinators and supporting new community based programmes although potentially with limited investment
- **Supporting governors.** FE and Skills Minister praised the work of college governors and confirmed that new guidance will be issued about their regulatory expectations as charity trustees in a speech to the AoC Colleges Governance Summit
- **A vision for technical and professional education.** The Collab Group along with member colleges and the consultancy PublicCo offered the first of what will be a two-part series of papers sketching out the contours and requirements of an enhanced technical and professional system of provision
- **Shaping the National Retraining Scheme.** Ex FE director Sue Pember published her report, commissioned by the Campaign for Learning and NCFE, looking into what form the National Retraining Scheme should take, concluding that it should be directed at adults and form part of a wider lifelong learning offer

Schools

- **The great unsolved issue.** Education Secretary Damian Hinds addressed last weekend's ASCL Conference where he devoted much of his presentation to tackling teacher workloads, which he described as 'one of the great unsolved issues for schools' and for which he put forward a number of proposals including no more curriculum reform during the lifetime of the Parliament and a review of regional systems



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- **Ofsted and workloads.** Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector, also made teacher workload a major theme of her presentation to the ASCL Conference outlining what steps Ofsted was taking, such as trying to take a sensible approach to the collection of data,
- **Retention factors.** The DfE reported on its recent research into why some teachers leave teaching and what might encourage them back, finding that workload remains the big factor although there can be different triggers, and with half of those surveyed saying they wouldn't consider coming back
- **Ready to return.** The DfE announced a new scheme to help teachers return to the frontline after a career break which will be piloted in two regions later this year and where 'lead' schools will test out ways of training and supporting such returners
- **Progress chart.** The DfE outlined what progress had been made in reducing teacher workload since the Workload Challenge was introduced four years ago where the focus has very much been on the three top issues of marking, planning and data management and which has seen things like myth busters, longer lead-in times for new initiatives and revised guidance all implemented
- **Under pressure.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) examined the financial health of state schools and reported that the number of secondary schools in deficit over the last four years had nearly trebled while many primary schools were also struggling concluding that many schools will struggle to meet staff and other costs in future
- **Alternative means.** The government outlined a number of measures including a major review of the system of exclusions, a dedicated fund and a map of provision to help try and improve things for pupils in alternative provision and/or in need of specialist support
- **Academy applications.** The Minister issued a set of figures, in response to a question in Parliament, showing how many schools had applied to become an Academy each month since January 2015
- **Teacher-examiner safeguards.** Ofqual launched a consultation on proposals to strengthen the regulation arrangements around using practicing teachers to help develop exam and assessment materials suggesting among other things that contractual obligations should be clear and signed up to, and some sampling of work by such teachers may be necessary
- **Integrating communities.** The government outlined a number of proposals in its Integrating Communities Green Paper on what role schools can play in this including continuing the focus on British values, reviewing Ofsted's powers over unregistered schools and reviewing guidance on home education
- **Chances of success at KS4.** Education datalab published the first of two mini blogs examining the relationship between attainment at KS1 and outcomes at KS4, in this case for English, showing that while attainment at KS1 is an important factor, it should not be seen as the sole determining one
- **Leading together.** Teach First launched a new initiative, with funding provided initially by the DfE, to help support and train aspiring school leaders many of whom report a lack of time and opportunities to undertake such training
- **Early Years Workforce.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) reported on its survey of the early years workforce, finding some positives such as an increase in minimum pay and a strategic commitment by government but equally concerns about overall pay, status and drop in qualification levels among staff
- **Give us the tools.** John Blake, education lead at the Policy Exchange think tank called for teachers to be provided with access to high-quality learning resources to help reduce workloads as well as better support the delivery of the reformed National Curriculum in a new report looking at developments four years on



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Tweets(s) of the week

- “Too much effort in schools goes into pleasing visitors” - [@ed_ontap](#)
- “An Uber-style two-way system that also lets lecturers rate students might not be a bad idea here” - [@rhymerrigby](#)
- “Once again the first step in the turnaround of a school was establishing basic discipline” - [@steveadcock81](#)
- “Asia’s top university makes computational thinking compulsory” - [@Jisc](#)

Other stories of the week

- Our changing tastes. Each March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reviews the so-called basket of goods and services that are used to calculate price rises as a basis for reporting consumer price inflation (CPI.) It's an important exercise that feeds into the Bank of England discussions on interest rates and government projections on the economy but it also offers a fascinating picture on how social habits and lifestyles are changing. This year, for instance, quiche, female leggings and action cameras are among the 15 new items included while pork pies, digi camcorders and ATM charges are among the 14 removed. A full list on what's in and out can be found in the Annex to the ONS report [here](#)
- If a litre of cola costs \$3.15, how much would you pay for a third? Apparently this is a question that foxes nearly a third of adults, according to university researchers who have been examining the OECD's data on adult skill performance in countries across the world. The researchers, from Cambridge and UCL, have expressed alarm at the low levels of adult financial literacy in this country and along with organisations like National Numeracy, are calling for more training and support accordingly. The answer, if need be, can be found in this BBC news report [here](#)
- She's back. To the relief of perhaps many teenagers and apparently adults, children's author Jacqueline Wilson has announced that Tracy Beaker is back. She will feature in a new book in the series, based around Tracy's daughter Jess, set in a London council estate and due to be published this October. A link to the news item is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “I am at my most positively Tigger-like” – the Chancellor adopts a bouncy persona for his Spring Statement
- “The economy has slightly more momentum in the near term thanks to the unexpected strength of the world economy” – the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) provides a medical on the economy
- “Secretary of State for Education is a hugely exciting role to be taking on. But I also feel the weight of responsibility” – the (newish) Education Secretary squares up to the challenges of the role
- “What methods/options do you think are best to measure teaching intensity?” – one of the crunch questions in the new subject-level TEF consultation
- “We will continue to make sure everyone knows how amazing apprenticeships can be” – the Skills Minister reflects on the latest successful National Apprenticeship Week



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- “In the longer term, we’re the generation who needs to define what it is to be a teacher in the 21st century, to make sure we don’t become the Luddite profession, doing things in the way we’ve always done them” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton calls on fellow heads to tackle teacher workloads
- “I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, we do not want to see a performance on inspection” – the Chief Inspector says it one more time
- “It’s not that students are keeping their mobile phones on their persons during the exams in order to do anything wrong, it’s simply that they cannot bear to be separated from them” – an Ofqual official reflects on the challenges of separating exam candidates from their mobile phones
- “In this landscape, discussions about teaching becomes a battle of prejudices – Pokeman debates where we simply hurl one unprovable claim against another until someone blinks” – education commentator and behavior expert Tom Bennett on the importance of evidence-based research

Number(s) of the week

- 1.5%. The percentage forecast for economic growth for the country for 2018 according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR)
- 500,000. How many more people are predicted to be in work in this country by 2022 according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR)
- 300,000. How many more university places may be needed in England by 2030 according to projections from the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- 107. How many apprentices are listed as having started in the DfE this year, 50% up on the year before, according to a question in Parliament answered by the Skills Minister
- £10.7bn. How much the apprenticeship levy is expected to raise in its first four years, down 8% on previous estimates but still considerably higher than pre-levy funding levels, according to FE Week
- 40m. How many hours of unpaid charitable and social enterprise activity the HE sector in the UK undertook in 2015/16 according to research from Viewforth Consulting
- 87,000. How many more secondary school places will be needed in England by 2021/22 (79,000 in primary,) according to latest government statistics
- 3,000. How many more school leaders are needed (and likely to grow) according to Teach First
- 75%. How many schools in England apply a book scrutiny at least once a term, according to data collected by Teacher Tapp

What to look out for next week

- Education Questions in Parliament (Monday)
- Annual Apprenticeship Conference (Wed – Friday)