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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 2 November 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.

A week dominated by the Budget and its aftermath.

Other interesting reports and comment pieces this week include a Briefing Paper from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) on education spending shifts in England, a report on teacher retention from the NFER, a report on issues in the skills system from the Centre for Progressive Policy, a Paper from Ofsted on current risks to the quality of education, reports from Edge and GuildHE on a 21stc curriculum and wellbeing in higher ed respectively and a survey from the charity Parentkind on just how much parents are voluntarily coughing up for various school activities and essentials.

But it's been Philip Hammond's latest Budget that has been attracting most of the headlines this week and 'little extras' apart, three key issues have dominated: is austerity really over; what state's the economy in; and what does Brexit do to it all. On whether austerity was over, the IFS offered its informed perspective but came away unsure: "On a narrow definition perhaps it is, on wider definitions isn't, at least not yet." On what state the economy was in, the Chancellor reeled off a spate of optimistic figures in his speech on employment, wages and potential growth but the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) verdict of 'stable but unspectacular' perhaps summed it up best. While on Brexit, to quote the OBR again, 'there remains no meaningful basis on which to predict the outcome of the current negotiations.'

If that's the big picture, how did education fare? In what was largely seen as a giveaway Budget, '72 minutes of delayed gratification' according to the FT, education was left largely underwhelmed. A hand-out for schools, some modifications to the apprenticeship levy, some extra funds for the Industrial Strategy, and welcome support for mental health, that was about it. 'Potholes not pupils' was how many in schools saw it while FE leaders spoke of their 'deep disappointment' particularly given their recent high-profile campaigns. Detailed coverage and commentary all listed below.

So what now for those interested in education? Three points stand out from the recent coverage.

First, and perhaps most salient, as former government adviser Jonathan Simons pointed out, it's the Spending Review rather than the Budget that really counts and of course next year's Review, which will set dept spending limits for the next three years, is happening at a critical time with the devolution of some adult ed budgets, the Augar Review, Brexit and so on. Second, as the IFS Briefing Note indicated, there has been 'a remarkable shift' in funding in recent years which suggests that pressure is paying off and at least some needs are being addressed. And third, as Amanda Spielman argued, this needs to be accompanied by better monitoring and improved quality of education for all.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Budget 2018: £400m to help schools buy 'little extras.' (Monday)
- 'Poor job satisfaction key reasons teachers quit.' (Tuesday)
- 'University stops making unconditional offers.' (Wednesday)
- 'Education spending now 'skewed' to poor following remarkable shift.' (Thursday)
- 'Hologram lecturers to teach students at university.' (Friday)

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **The big red book.** The Treasury published the traditional Budget red book setting out the planning and spending details behind the Chancellor's latest Budget with most of the education and skill details in Sections 4 and 5
- **The Chancellor's Budget speech.** The Treasury also published the full text of the Chancellor's Budget speech minus the jokes and some political content
- **The big picture on the economy.** The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its accompanying comprehensive 250+ page assessment of the state of the country's finances both now and for the future in light of the Budget, Brexit and other economic determinants
- **Funding shifts.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) reported on what it called 'a remarkable shift' in education funding in the first decade of this century which as a result of better targeting, more young people staying-on beyond 16 and going to college, the pupil premium and more, has seen the funding balance tilt towards children from poorer backgrounds
- **Low Pay.** The government issued its response to the latest Low Pay Commission recommendations as part of the Budget documents, accepting an increase in hourly rates across the board from next April
- **Resilient infrastructure.** The government also issued a letter to the National Infrastructure Commission as part of its Budget Papers, calling on it to undertake an assessment into 'the resilience of the country's economic infrastructure' and its ability to be able to withstand shocks and threats
- **Social Mobility Commissioners.** The Education Secretary announced the names of the 12 new Social Mobility Commissioners ahead of the launch of the new Commission in December

HE

- **Budget 2018.** The Chancellor made a few gestures towards science and research in his Budget statement and announced some money for University Enterprise Zones but acknowledged that any further announcements would have to await the outcomes of the post-18 review
- **A view from HE.** Universities UK offered its thoughts on the Budget acknowledging that the big decisions may have to wait for the current review but suggesting that apart from some extra support for R/D, there was little to excite the sector
- **Hard times.** The Times Higher reported on the backcloth to current stories about some universities facing large deficits, citing the challenges of a competitive market, increased pension costs, and large-scale building programmes as major factors



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- **In front of the Committee.** The Education Guardian reported on the sharp interchange of views between the Education Committee and the Student Loans Company over how the latter went about checking for individual loan eligibility
- **No more unconditional offers.** St Mary's Twickenham announced that it was ending its use of unconditional offers for this year following an internal review pointing to possible negative effects
- **Tertiary facts.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) reported in a new blog on global recruitment trends in tertiary education, pointing to the fact that the UK has been lagging behind for much of this century with the drop in L4/5 enrolments seen as one of the major factors
- **Wellbeing in HE.** GuildHE reported on its recent survey among students and staff on wellbeing, concluding that many providers don't have a recognised definition of it and listing ten areas in which wellbeing needs to be considered
- **How to write off student debt.** Professor Danny Dorling offered some personal thoughts on dealing with tuition fees in a comment piece in the Education Guardian arguing for a progressive model based on implementing a cap on maximum future student loan repayments and writing off the rest of the debts
- **Name the price.** The Times reported that the new, and quite different, engineering 'university' which is due to open in Hereford next autumn, was looking for benefactors to support, and potentially give their name to, features of the new institution

FE/Skills

- **Budget 2018.** The Chancellor announced a cut in apprenticeship contributions from small businesses in his Budget, confirmed additional flexibilities for the levy system and funding for the launch of T levels and added a bit more for the National Retraining Scheme but added nothing to core FE or 16-19 budgets
- **The view from FE.** The Association of Colleges offered its traditional helpful summary and observations on this year's Budget, concluding that it had failed to tackle some of the big issues around skills and social cohesion and hoping for better news from the forthcoming Spending Review
- **Skills for Inclusive Growth.** The newish think tank, the Centre for Progressive Policy, reported on its continuing work into improving the skills system focusing in particular on three groups at risk, young learners with low level quals, adults in low paid work and adults at risk of displacement, and coming up with some helpful recommendations for improving things in each case
- **English speaking.** Education First, the company which specializes in international English Language training, issued the latest version of its Proficiency Index showing an increase in the number of countries, notably in Africa, with improved proficiency ratings in English

Schools

- **Budget 2018.** The Chancellor announced a one-off capital payment in his Budget of £400m to help schools purchase 'the little things they needed,' along with more help with pension costs, mental health, the strategy for tackling 'gang crime' and some work on the retention of early career maths and physics teachers
- **The view from here.** The Headteachers' Roundtable offered its thoughts on the Budget, expressing deep disappointment and highlighting five issues which need to be tackled in the Spending Review



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- **Digging deep.** The charity Parentkind reported on how much on average parents were voluntarily contributing to schools for such activities as after school clubs, teaching equipment and in some cases, the essentials of life
- **Ofsted concerns.** The Chief Inspector outlined some of the many concerns the inspectorate had about the current quality of education and the effectiveness of measuring this in a detailed and significant letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, citing in particular issues of funding, curriculum narrowing, undue reliance on data and unregistered provision
- **The Dynamics of the Teacher Workforce.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published its latest research, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, into factors affecting teacher retention and turnover, highlighting workloads, poor job satisfaction and lack of job flexibility as major issues
- **Secure School.** The Ministry of Justice launched the application process for not-for-profit providers interested in running the UK's first Secure School which is due to open in Kent in autumn 2020 providing education and health services for young people in a custodial setting
- **Future Learning.** The Edge Foundation launched its latest report on building a 21stc education system calling for a more creative and skills-based curriculum and highlighting case study evidence of institutions applying this approach
- **The dangers of exclusion.** Barnardo's and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Knife Crime published the results of new research showing increasing concern by parents about youth violence and an alarming lack of places for children excluded from school likely to be vulnerable as a result
- **Online.** Ofqual announced the launch of its new, composite handbook of qualification rules and guidance, now brought together in a single online publication
- **What frightens us most?** Ark Teacher Training published an interesting blog, coincidentally released on Halloween Day, about the sorts of things that frighten trainee teachers most, ranging from 'loathsome lesson observations' to 'petrifying parents'
- **Dear whoever.** The National Literacy Trust marked Blue Peter's 60th birthday by reporting on how many children are writing letters whether to the TV programme, friends or whoever, noting that this remains popular among many children and has actually grown nearly 8% in recent years bringing both skill and emotional benefits
- **Another telly series.** The TES reported that a new documentary on schools will start next week looking at three secondary schools in an Education Trust in South Gloucestershire and the pressures and challenges they face over funding, pastoral care and other issues

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Budget 2018: A bit of a gamble, says IfS" - @AELPUK
- "I think I was guilty of management by donuts: in the dark days I would bring in donuts but what I should have done is led by example and said I was going home to spend time with my children, says @RealGeoffBarton" - @LKMco
- "Dear secondary teachers. Just to let you know that I have inspected my year 9 son's homework and it was not up to standard. He's now sat at the dinner table re-doing the entire thing with more care and attention to detail. Obviously I should do this sort of thing anyway" - @iQuirky_Teacher



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- “As a small business, we’ve come across this issue in young employees – a lack of focus and the inability to work without constant interruptions by social media. Another fellow small business owner won’t employ youngsters under 30 because they can’t focus long enough to do the job!” - [@creva](#)
- “I asked a class of year 11 students who had ever written on an Interactive Whiteboard...the answer was 0” - [@deepexperience1](#)
- “Lewis Hamilton outlines his plans after #F1. ‘If I want to be remembered for anything it’s helping some kids get through school, get through difficult times’” - [@IndySport](#)
- “Just had a press release on staff training, saying instead of ‘stale training days,’ employers should hold ‘an all-day festival of thinking.’ Real life leaving parody in the starting blocks” - [@seanjcoughlan](#)

Other stories of the week

- [Budget gobbledegook](#). Do you know your CPI from your RPI, the difference between debt and deficit? Appropriately enough in a week in which these and other economic terms have been widely bandied about as part of the Budget discussions, the Full Fact team have looked at how far we actually understand them. Apparently GDP is the least well understood term with 10% getting it right in one survey, followed by inflation at 16% and quantitative easing at 30%.
- [The millennial railcard](#). It’s taken some time to develop and it had a pretty chaotic trial run earlier this year but the 26-30 railcard, announced in last year’s autumn Budget, has at last been set for a formal launch by the end of the year. It costs £30 and offers 30% off most off-peak rail fares, including for example the Gatwick Express though not Eurostar. There won’t be a physical ticket with the ‘card’ being applied via a smartphone app.

Quote(s) of the week

- “We will continue to plan for all eventualities” – the Chancellor prepares for the future but sticks with the present in his latest Budget speech
- “The big picture in this forecast is of a relatively stable but unspectacular trajectory for economic growth” – the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) sums things up in its accompanying economic report
- “If I were a prison governor, a local authority chief executive or a headteacher, I would struggle to find much to celebrate” – IfS director Paul Johnson offers his verdict on the Budget in the think tank’s traditional Budget analysis
- “While for some, the snowflake phenomenon is little more than an excuse to sling around an unkind name, that doesn’t mean we should rush to dismiss any and all arguments put forward” – the VC at Sussex University prepares to host a seminar on ‘The Snowflake Generation: Fact or Fiction?’
- “I am concerned that the current construction of the accountability system no longer reflects the education system we have today” – Ofsted Chief Inspector pulls no punches in an open letter about the current quality of education and how it’s monitored

Number(s) of the week

- 1.3%. The forecast for UK growth this year, down from an earlier forecast of 1.5% according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR)



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- 1.2%. The annual average growth in departmental spending promised by the Chancellor as part of his Budget statement although most of it has been earmarked for the NHS
- 2%. How much tax large digital firms may have to pay from April 2020 on UK revenues as part of the proposed Digital Services Tax announced in the Budget
- 5%. The (smaller) amount small and medium sized business will have to pay for the costs of apprenticeship training, as announced by the Chancellor
- £10,000 and £50,000. How much the average primary and secondary school respectively should receive from the one-off additional capital funding announced by the Chancellor
- 490. How many schools are 'stuck' in cycle of poor performance, 290+ primary schools and 190+ secondary schools, according to the Ofsted Chief Inspector
- £11.35. How much on average parents were voluntarily contributing for various schools activities each month, up from £8.90 last year, according to the charity Parentkind
- 54%. The number of parents who think more children than the year before are becoming involved in serious youth violence, according to a survey by YouGov
- 17%. How many primary schools apply a silent corridor policy, according to Teacher Tapp
- 36.7%. How many children surveyed aged 8 – 18 write letters in their free time, up from 28.9%, according to research from the National Literacy Trust

What to look out for next week

- Wonkhe's Wonkfest (Monday, Tuesday)
- CBI/Pearson Employer Skills Survey (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on school funding (Tuesday)
- Bath University Institute for Policy Research event on 'HE: Decline and Fall' (Wednesday)