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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 5 October 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.

The Conservatives have been in Conference this week with plenty to chew over; they also found time for some education, training and skills announcements. More on these in a minute.

In other news this week, independent schools have featured widely with a new [report](#) from the Independent Schools Council (ISC) on how much they contribute to the economy and with the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference ([HMC](#)) having their own three-day bash in Manchester. Elsewhere, the rush to catch the Chancellor's eye ahead of his Budget now just three weeks away has continued with both the [Association of Colleges](#) (AoC) and the [Local Government Association](#) (LGA) submitting their proposals, GuildHE has published an interesting [report](#) questioning the reliance on employment data for measuring the value of uni degrees and a new [report](#) has looked at why teenagers aren't applying for apprenticeships. And finally, it's worth looking at two little funding primers from this week, one from the [IfS](#) on Labour's spending plans and the other from the [BBC](#) on school spending claims, both excellent summaries.

A lot to cover therefore but here are a few education standouts from the Conservative Party Conference. The TES listed five things that the [Education Secretary](#) didn't mention such as funding and workloads but here's five that he and others did mention.

First, apprenticeships, included in the Chancellor's speech, trailed as '[a package of reforms](#)' but where the reality was a more modest increase in the amount of levy funds that could be transferred in supply chains plus a bit of money for developing new standards. The bigger news here surely is how much of the levy is unspent and why and the commitment in the speech to consult on levy operation in the future. Second, the topping up of cash for T levels, this time for resources for the first wave of providers in 2020 and further evidence that the government is determined to ensure that funding for the new T levels won't be an issue.

Third, careers, caned by the Education Committee earlier this summer and now to have an increase in the number of trained career leaders and networks but not much more money, £5m to the £9m already on the table. Fourth, English and maths, a standard item in most education speeches these days where the Education Secretary announced further extension of the centre for excellence model to support best practice in primary literacy and tertiary maths. And fifth and on best practice again, some extra money, £10m, to support training in managing pupil behaviour.

But perhaps the key message came towards the end of the PM's [speech](#) when she signalled an end to austerity: Hopefully the Chancellor was listening ahead of his forthcoming Budget.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Chancellor announces apprenticeship levy reforms.' ([Monday](#))
- 'T levels: £38m in capital funding for providers.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Skills could boost economy by £21bn a year.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Ofsted chief inspector warns over apprenticeship providers.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'DfE school funding claims face watchdog investigation.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [An end to austerity?](#) The Prime Minister's Conference speech adopted a new tone and perhaps Strictly audience as it attempted to tackle a range of issues including housing, the cost of living and the market economy but most significantly of all, suggested an end to austerity was in sight
- [Glass half full Phil.](#) The Chancellor claimed he felt positive about a Brexit Deal Dividend in his Conference speech as he outlined a number of measures on skills and training to help businesses grow in the future
- [3 Ps.](#) The Education Secretary cited three driving forces (progress, productivity, and preparedness) as he pledged more money for T levels, English and maths, pupil behaviour, careers and school sport
- [Cyber cadets.](#) The Defence Secretary announced plans in his Conference speech to increase the number of cadets in schools including a new generation of 'cyber cadets' who will be trained up to deal with cyber security threats
- [Education spending claims.](#) The BBC's Education correspondent Sean Coughlan examined the government's regularly repeated claim about school funding noting that as this included other spends such as tuition fees, the reality of the claim was a little different
- [Service threat.](#) The Local Government Association highlighted the sorts of pressures many local councils were facing as a result of budget cuts as it listed measures it felt the government should take as part of the forthcoming Budget and Spending Review
- [Made in Wales.](#) The Education Secretary in Wales, Kirsty Williams, outlined the new devolved approach to determining teachers' pay in Wales which will see employers, unions and government, working together in a new Partnership Forum before submitting proposals to the Welsh Pay Review Body

HE

- [Freedom of expression.](#) The HE Minister Sam Gyimah, reported that he was supporting moves by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to ensure that freedom of speech within the law remained at the heart of university life and called on universities to do the same
- [LEO limitations.](#) Guild HE published the results of its work undertaken by London Economics looking into the use of Longitudinal Employment Outcomes (LEO) like graduate jobs and outcomes to assess the value and cost of university degrees, arguing that as data like regional employment differences was not included, its use was limited



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- **Staying local.** The Office for Students (OfS) launched a new competition for providers to work up arrangements to support graduates transition into local employment
- **Monitoring access agreements.** The Office for Students (OfS) published the results of its monitoring of 2016/17 access agreements completed by the two previous overseeing bodies, OFFA and HEFCE, pointing to more money being spent on widening participation by providers than the year before and more progress being made
- **Degree apprenticeships.** The Office for Students reported on its research into the profile of those who took up degree apprenticeships in 2016/17 noting that while numbers were growing, some groups such as those from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds were missing out
- **Widening participation at Cambridge.** The Times Higher reported on the annual address by the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge in which he confirmed that the University was hoping to raise £500m to support disadvantaged students as well as establishing a transition year scheme to help those with potential but who need help to meet entry requirements
- **Bring back maintenance grants.** Professor Dave Phoenix, Chair of the Million Plus group of Universities, made the case for restoring maintenance grants, arguing that they help support lifelong learning and skills acquisition, in a fringe group meeting at the Conservative Party Conference
- **Mental health alerts.** Bristol University reported that most of its students had signed up to its new 'alert' system which allows staff to contact parents/guardians in cases of concern, following a rise in suspected suicides over recent years

FE/Skills

- **Future of the levy.** The government announced it would consult on the operation of the apprenticeship levy beyond 2020 as the Chancellor used his Conference speech to confirm further funding and flexibility for the levy
- **T level resources.** The Education Secretary announced in his Conference speech that £38m was being made available through a bidding process, due next year, to provide equipment and resources for the first wave of T level providers
- **Over-skilled and Underused.** The CIPD reported on its work looking into skill and qualification utilization in the UK workforce suggesting a high degree of mismatch in a number of areas and calling for better understanding, matching and training to be key priorities in the industrial strategy
- **Budget briefing.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) followed up its proposals for the 2019 Spending Review with a set of more immediate issues to be considered under the forthcoming Budget including improving 16-19 funding, maintaining the adult education budget and setting up a higher tech ed development fund
- **Funding bands.** The Institute for Apprenticeships published the revised funding bands for 12 apprenticeship standards now approved by the government showing bands increased in two cases, staying the same in three, and reduced in seven
- **IoT update.** The government listed the 16 bids for Institute of Technology status now being worked up and due to be formally announced in March 2019
- **Why aren't teenagers applying for apprenticeships?** The consultancy GK and Partners reported on their survey of young people undertaken this summer indicating that only 16% of those surveyed were



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considering an apprenticeship and concluding that initial wages, lack of information and parental wishes were all potential barriers

- [There're all myths](#). Ofsted updated its list of myths about inspections in colleges confirming for instance that it doesn't look for a particular teaching style, doesn't expect to see lesson plans and doesn't require all teachers to be observed and graded by their college leaders
- [Stitched up](#). Ian Pryce, chief exec of Bedford College, questioned in a comment piece in the TES why when it comes to public funding FE colleges were so often stitched up, arguing that proper funding rather than occasional bailouts was the way forward

Schools

- [Education Secretary's Conference speech](#). Damian Hinds promised more funds in his Conference speech for tackling pupil behaviour, improving primary literacy and supporting school sport although disappointed some by saying little on school funding, teacher recruitment and workloads
- [Performing arts](#). The Secretary for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport used his Conference speech to announce funding to support the creation of five Youth Performance Partnerships which will work with the Arts Council to help develop performing arts in schools
- [Helpful friends](#). HMC Chair, Shaun Fenton, outlined the work the HMC was doing in working with young people at home and in helping UK education develop abroad through international partnerships in his speech to the annual Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC)
- [Cost benefits](#). The Independent Schools Council (ISC) reported on its commissioned research into how much ISC member schools contributed to the UK economy in 2017 suggesting, including jobs, tax revenues, savings on school places and exports, a figure of £13.71bn
- [Marketing toolkit](#). The government added marketing templates and guidance to its marketing toolkit for providers, aimed at helping them promote their initial teacher training programmes
- [Workload survey](#). The National Education Union (NEU) published the results of its teacher workload survey undertaken two months ago showing that few teachers had seen any signs of things improving
- [Welcome to the Assessment Hub](#). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) launched its new Assessment Hub, a free site to help practitioners with a range of resources and support
- [Career plans](#). The global innovation foundation NESTA outlined the work it was doing with a number of partners to help provide young people with up-to-date employment trends and opportunities that could help them with their career choices
- [Pre-school books](#). The market researcher Childwise reported on its new survey into books for pre-school children showing that parents now spend around £7 a month on books for their children, slightly up on the year before, with The Gruffalo the most popular among toddlers
- [Learning difficulties](#). The Medical Research Council reported on some recent research which had used 'machine learning' to help personalize the difficulties some learners were experiencing enabling more individual solutions to be applied as a result

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Lord Willetts: there is not a standard funding model that can simply be applied across the whole of the tertiary education system" - [@EduPolicyInst](#)



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- “Best ad you’ve done @NickGibbUK. Very pleased to share it. ‘Every lesson shapes a life.’” - @NEUnion
- “Love Island-obsessed teenage girls are undermining Me Too cause, claims headmistress” - @Telegraph
- “Clapping has been banned at University of Manchester Students’ Union events to avoid triggering anxiety and improve accessibility. Students are instead encouraged to use ‘jazz hands’ to express their support” - @BBCNWT
- “Another audit on site today. The assessor just drove in via the Exit past two No Entry signs” - @matthewnaylor

Other stories of the week

- [10 steps to happy kids](#). In his address to the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference (HMC) this week, the Chair of the Conference offered his thoughts on what makes for an enriching and enduring curriculum for young people. He suggested ten ingredients including joy, curiosity, creativity and emotional literacy. Not all schools would be able to deliver on such a curriculum but at a time when the nature of the curriculum is again under discussion, it makes for an interesting list.
- [‘A thing that makes me happy.’](#) As part of this year’s National Poetry Day which took place on Thursday this week, the National Literacy Trust conducted its first ever survey of children’s views on poetry in England. As this quote from a Year 4 boy suggests, a lot of children enjoy poetry, especially interestingly those on free school meals. Teachers appear to be the main source of inspiration followed by parents/carers although one in five are happy to do it on their own, often using it as a way to express feelings.

Quote(s) of the week

- “A decade after the financial crash, people need to know that the austerity it led to is over and that their hard work has paid off” – the PM points to light at the end of the tunnel
- “So just in case anyone, anywhere was in any doubt at all...let me say it loud and clear: the Conservative Party is, and always will be, the party of business” – the Chancellor makes some things loud and clear
- “So not only will there be a new values test but we will also strengthen the English language requirements for all new citizens” – the Home Secretary spells out some of the implications of his Party’s new immigration regime
- “Higher education should be about the relentless pursuit of truth. This requires space for dissenting voices and challenging opinions” – the HE Minister on campus freedom of speech
- “Who has heard of T levels?” – the Education Secretary checks before announcing more money in his Conference speech
- “I think the issue is more to do with how we talk about the complexity of FE than with the complexity itself” – Dame Ruth Silver on strengthening the narrative around FE
- “No child should leave school feeling that education has been little more than life’s longest to-do list” – the HMC Chair, Shaun Fenton, sets out the wide role of education at HMC’s Annual Conference
- “This isn’t about getting extra violin lessons for our kids” – a group of Surrey mothers take the County Council to court over proposed cuts to special needs budgets



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Number(s) of the week

- £200m. How much the Home Secretary promised to help schools and others tackle rising gang crime
- £3.9bn. The shortfall in funding for public services in England next year according to a new report by the Local Government Association
- 50% of women and 47% of men. How many people surveyed claim to go home exhausted, a growing trend, according to the latest Skills and Employment Survey
- £887.7m. How much was spent by HE providers on various widening participation activities in 2016/17, up £4.3m on the previous year, according to the latest report by the Office for Students
- £5m. How much additional funding will be given to the Institute for Apprenticeships to help with the development of apprenticeship standards, according to the Chancellor in his Conference speech
- £38m. How much funding has been announced to help the first wave of T level providers with resources and equipment, according to the Education Secretary in his Conference speech
- 32. How many primary English hubs the government is setting up to help improve the teaching of early language and reading, according to the Education Secretary in his Conference speech
- 73. How many independent schools have partnered with or opened up international schools over the last few years according to the Chair of the HMC
- 78% of secondary teachers and 69% of primary teachers. How many teachers surveyed say that they can't cope with all the marking they have to do, according to the National Education Union
- 2.8 hours a day. How much time pre-school children spend watching TV and online content, up from 2.6 hours last year, according to research from Childwise

What to look out for next week

- Parliament re-assembles after the Conference season (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on school and college funding (Wednesday)