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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 5 April 2019

(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 Easter break yet for MPs and the week has also brought the usual late rush of reports and announcements for schools, FE and HE as they look forward to theirs.

Top of the pile this week has been the launch of the government's [EdTech strategy](#). Officially announced in a speech by the Education Secretary, it has been some time coming and has led to concerns that the UK is behind the curve but as the chair of Edtech UK put it: 'it is a sensible steps strategy.' It feeds off the government's Industrial and International Education Strategies and broadly identifies five areas of opportunity 'where technology can drive a step change in education.' These include: admin processes, assessment processes, teaching practices, professional development and learning throughout life. It all comes with a set of challenges, 10 in total, with a delivery target date of 2021. It's an important read.

In other education developments this week, MPs [debated](#) FE funding at the start of the week and questioned the FE and Schools Minister about funding and technology at the [Education Committee](#) the day after. If nothing else, it seems that serious consideration is being given to five-ten year funding plans for education. In other political news this week, the Education Secretary launched [consultation](#) on a new registration and support system for children not educated in school while the government has been hosting an extensive summit on knife crime with the Home Secretary launching a more contentious [consultation](#) proposing a specific set of duties for public sector workers like teachers and nurses when it comes to assessing risk.

More specifically this week.

In higher education, the Education Secretary made his third [promised intervention](#), this time calling for action on unconditional offers. The HE Policy Institute and JISC published an important [Paper](#) on cyber security in HE, and the Office for Students [reported](#) on the financial health of HE providers in England; 'reasonable' but need to be realistic in your planning assumptions.

In FE, the week has seen another apprenticeship [report](#) this time from the Union and College Union, and there's been a lot of activity as indicated around funding, including a [Paper](#) on devolved funding from the Campaign for Learning and NCFE. A standout [Paper](#) this week has been a new document from the DfE, setting out how it intends to supervise colleges; preventative intervention the approach here.

Finally, a number of developments for schools. They include Ofqual's latest [survey](#) on how qualifications are perceived and [recommendations](#) that careers education should begin earlier, while a new think tank, EDSK, and the [NAHT](#) have helped bring the Ofsted consultation to a close today with a bump.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Schools and NHS could be held accountable over knife crime.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Tory MPs back pay rise for college lecturers.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'DfE looks at NHS style five-year funding plan in education.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Hackers beat university cyber- defences in two hours.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'DfE tells universities to stop unethical admissions tactics.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [EdTech strategy](#). The government launched a new strategy to help develop the use of technology across education, citing five areas in particular where it was looking to work with leading experts and practitioners to help deliver improved outcomes over the next couple of years
- [It's your duty](#). The government launched a new consultation that could see public sector workers such as teachers, the police and NHS workers faced with a new 'public health duty' of having to report concerns about young people at risk of becoming involved in knife crime
- [Quarterly Economic Survey](#). The British Chambers of Commerce published the details from its Q1 Economic Survey showing weakening indicators across both manufacturing and service sectors

HE

- [Feeling the financial pulse](#). The Office for Students (OfS) published the results of its latest financial health check on HE providers in England, reporting an overall verdict of 'reasonable' but noting that many were running with optimistic targets on increased student numbers which, given the current uncertainty around the sector, may need modifying
- [Admissions practices](#). The Education Secretary made another of his promised interventions calling for action on the practice of unconditional offers which has spread in recent years, writing to a number of universities involved and urging the Office for Students to look at the matter
- [There's an app for that](#). The Universities Minister announced the launch of two new apps designed to help prospective students gather information on potential graduate earnings and employment options from preferred courses
- [Cyber safe](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) and JISC reported on the state of cyber security in higher education noting the increase in risks and potential attacks and the ease with which systems can be compromised, calling on the sector to adopt the new British Standard created to help governing bodies and managers assess risks
- [Stopping payments](#). PayPal confirmed that it was in the process of identifying which essay writing services were illegal and writing to the companies concerned to close down payments but that this could take some time



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FE/Skills

- **FE funding.** The Education Committee raised a number of questions on FE funding in a witness session with the Skills Minister in which she acknowledged the extent of funding concerns, suggested that the Dept was looking at five-ten year funding plans but affirmed that she didn't believe there'd be an overspend in the apprenticeship budget this year at least
- **Trigger points.** The DfE beefed up its College Oversight policy with a series of new triggers around prevention and intervention particularly in matters of financial health with the option of regional reviews in cases where local provision was at risk
- **New intervention measures.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) strengthened its procedures for dealing with independent training providers signaling a shift away from relying on minimum standards towards earlier intervention based on clearer data, tighter contract management, targeted assurance reviews and contract sanctions
- **College leadership.** The Social Market Foundation in the first of what will be two reports on college leaders looked at the many challenges and changes leaders now face and the different skills and competences now required with a second report to follow on how best they can be supported
- **Devolution of post-16 funding.** The Campaign for Learning and NCFE published a collection of essays from leading 'experts' looking into the issue of devolved funding for post-16 provision including apprenticeships, with caution generally being urged over further developments until current issues are resolved
- **Apprenticeship Charter.** The University and College Union (UCU) launched a new Charter for apprenticeships calling for a shift away from the current government target of 3m starts and towards more high-quality programmes based on the needs of young people
- **STEM return.** The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) published new research suggesting that 30 yr olds with high level vocational qualifications in STEM subjects tend to earn better than those with similar degrees in many universities

Schools

- **Qualification perceptions.** Ofqual published the latest in its annual series looking into how different groups of people, from teachers, to parents and the general public, perceive qualifications, noting that overall confidence in mainstream exams and the marking and grading procedures remains high, that some groups are more aware of qualification changes than others and that questions remain about the long-term role of GCSEs
- **School funding.** The Education Committee questioned Nick Gibb about technology and school funding where he acknowledged that the Dept was aware of the funding challenges facing schools particularly around high needs and post-16, was considering the case for five-ten year funding plans, and remained convinced about the importance of the EBacc
- **High Needs Funding.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) examined issues around high needs funding which is becoming an increasing cause of concern as numbers and expectations rise and the system struggles to cope with the EPI calling for greater flexibility for schools to move money between funding blocks and local councils granted greater autonomy over the commissioning of services



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- **Home alone.** The government launched a consultation on its proposals for ensuring children not being educated in school were registered and able to access and support and resources from local authorities where needed
- **Using technology in education.** The DfE issued a series of little guides to help schools looking to change or update their technology applications covering such areas as choosing the right broadband or moving to the cloud, and issued to accompany its overarching EdTech strategy
- **Times tables.** The Standards and Testing Agency published guidance for those schools piloting the multiplication tables check with their Year 4s this June ahead of a national roll out next year, suggesting that some schools might want to get their pupils ready by giving them a go at the 'try out' area
- **Starting early.** LKMco and Founders4Schools published a new report on careers education calling for an age-related approach, starting with early years with for example jobs corners for infants and moving through to c.v. writing workshops for those aged 16 and over

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Nations should consider rebalancing their education systems, and potentially reducing university enrolment levels, to tackle youth unemployment rates, former ETH president tells #THE innovation" - [@CHavergalTHE](#)
- "Ethical hackers in test attacks beat university cyber-defences in two hours. Research data and personal and financial information vulnerable" - [@seanjcoughlan](#)
- "Cartoon style imagery is for kids. I don't watch cartoons on TV so don't give me them when I'm learning...they're so damn condescending" - [@DonaldClark](#)
- "My 11 yr old took delivery of 5 brand new books last week, the first thing he did was smell the inside. You don't get that with tech! He's now got 2 books on the go!" - [@ElizStanley_](#)
- "This week's homework for parents is making an Easter bonnet and a garden shoe box. What homework has your school set you?" - [@profbeckyallen](#)
- "Netherlands makes trains free on national book day for those who show a book instead of a ticket" - [@ElizabethREzra](#)

Other stories of the week

- **What makes children feel lonely?** The government among many other bodies have been looking into this issue for some time. At the end of last year, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported on some of the factors following an extensive survey among young people and this week the ONS published further analysis. As before, it's a profound but quite complex issue. Happiness with home and friends are clearly critical factors but access to what others have is also an important indicator.

Quote(s) of the week

- "What should a young person think if they finish their education and are told by society 'Sorry, we do not need you.' We need to do better" – the THE Innovation and Impact summit considers issues around university enrolment levels
- "We don't know yet" – the Skills Minister tells the Education Committee she's not sure how much the National Retraining Scheme will actually cost



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- “Once the review has concluded, the government’s aim is that qualifications available alongside A’ levels, T levels and apprenticeships will be high quality and will set students on a clear path to a job, further education or training” – the government responds to a question from former Education Secretary David Blunkett on where BTECs will fit in following the current Level 3 and below review
- “The term ‘home education’ has now acquired a much broader meaning than it used to” – the Education Secretary introduces consultation on a new register for children not being educated in school
- “In just about every institution the tyranny of regulatory impositions and the upward delegation of day-to-day decision making swamps leadership and governing bodies” – Mike Boxall, PA Consulting’s HE expert on some of the challenges universities face as they set up new business models
- “The majority of these providers are not reliant on such projected growth to ensure their financial viability but they need to produce their projected costs if their student recruitment ambitions are not met” – the Office for Students calls for higher ed institutions to think carefully about forecast student numbers
- “There’s been a lack of national conversation about the promise of Edtech for too long and this strategy is an important stepping stone in this overdue conversation” – Ty Goddard, chair of Edtech UK welcomes the government’s new EdTech strategy
- “It is hard to see how it would be either workable or reasonable to make teachers accountable for preventing knife crime” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton reacts to the government’s latest proposals to hold teachers and others accountable for reporting concerns about young people at risk of becoming involved in knife crime
- “When students got to Year 11 and now had the comparison between digital and hard copy, they preferred the hard copy” – the principal of a Junior school in Australia on why they’re moving back to text books

Number(s) of the week

- £3.90. The new hourly wage for (16-18 yr old or 19+ in their first year) apprentices, up from £3.70 following in increase in minimum wages from this April
- 171,000. How many more full time students higher ed institutions are forecasting they’ll attract over the next four years, according to the latest sustainability figures published by the Office for Students
- £33bn. The aggregate income for the English HE sector in 2017/18, up 7.5% on the previous year, according to figures published by the Office for Students
- 2 hours. How long it took ‘friendly’ hackers to break through university cyber defences, according to an experiment conducted by JISC
- 69%. The percentage of employers who recognised that 9 is the top grade in the ‘new’ GCSE grading scale compared to 64% last year, according to research conducted for Ofqual
- 500. How many schools are struggling with slow internet connectivity, according to figures quoted in the government’s new EdTech strategy
- £1.4bn. The capital budget for schools for 2019/20 to cover things like estate maintenance and buildings refurbishment, as announced by the DfE
- 1,572. How many primary school children in England were now in PRUs (Pupil Referral Units,) a marked increase over recent years, according to research from the Labour Party



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What to look out for next week

- National Union of Students Annual Conference (Tuesday – Thursday)
- Scheduled EU ‘emergency’ meeting (Wednesday)