Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 1 March 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.

Quite a spread of stories this week ranging from tomorrow’s technology to today’s sex and relationship education.

Tomorrow’s technology featured heavily in Nesta’s excellent report about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in schools and colleges, where according to Sir Anthony Seldon who wrote the Foreword, we are on the cusp of a revolution. Revolutionary talk was also in the air at the Education Committee this week as it continued its inquiry into the 4th industrial revolution by questioning OECD Education Director Andreas Schleicher about his thoughts. Teachers needing to upgrade their skills every day and curricula that help students develop wider skills were among the points raised here.

As for sex and relationship education, that came in the form of new guidance issued by the DfE following consultation last year and explained in careful detail to MPs by the Education Secretary in a question and answer session in the Commons. ‘Hoo-ruddy-ray’ was the reaction of one MP, others however questioned some of the features including notably the nature of provision for primary school children and the opt-out procedures for parents/pupils in secondary schools. Schools will be left to decide exactly how to teach the new content but the aim is for it all to be available from next year.

In HE, the government issued the Office for Students with its latest remit letter, the Minister heralded new guidance on access and participation, the CBI warned against disrupting the tuition fee system and Universities UK outlined a number of recommendations for improving the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) as the review group’s call for evidence drew to a close.

In FE/Skills, the DfE began the process of finding a partner to help shape its promised transition programme for those young people not quite ready yet to start a T level, the think tank Policy Exchange published a report on T levels and what could be learnt from past ventures in this area, the DfE published a report on the Level 4/5 market, Ofqual launched a consultation on managing centre assessment and the government and others lined up resources and activities for next week’s National Apprenticeships Week.

Finally, over in schools, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published its first annual report on the teacher workforce in England pointing to continuing shortages in some secondary subjects, the BBC published research showing the drop in take-up of some modern foreign languages in recent years, and the government set out its proposals for the proposed reception baseline assessment due to be piloted this autumn. At least it’s been a shorter month.
Top headlines this week

- ‘Ofqual proposes getting tougher on exam centres.’ (Monday)
- ‘Thousand fewer UK students at Oxbridge.’ (Tuesday)
- ‘School language learning at 18 year low.’ (Wednesday)
- ‘T levels risk repeating past mistakes, says report.’ (Thursday)
- ‘Parents still prefer university to apprenticeships.’ (Friday)

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **Educ-AI -tion.** The global innovation foundation Nesta launched a comprehensive new report on the future of artificial intelligence in schools and colleges, highlighting both concerns and opportunities but suggesting AI can help with five what it called ‘wicked challenges’ such as teacher workloads, restrictive assessment and inflexible learning routes, facing schools today
- **Digital Access.** The Learning Foundation and the technology company Nominet announced a new Digital Access for All taskforce which will undertake a range of activities over the next few months to help ensure digital equal access to all children and young people in the UK
- **Keeping kids safe.** The Children’s Commissioner for England reported on young people's gangs, looking at what led children to join gangs such as substance abuse and school absences, and what could be done to help tackle the issue
- **First 1000 days of life.** The Commons Health and Social Care Committee called for increased support and investment for early years in a new report proposing in particular a cross-government early years strategy based on six principles including early intervention and proportionate universalism
- **Losing power?** Former Chancellor George Osborne called for a re-galvanizing of the Northern Powerhouse project proposing among things a dedicated northern schools board, more devolution deals and improved transport links to ensure the project maintained momentum

HE

- **Taking orders.** The government published its latest remit letter for the Office for Students welcoming the progress made so far in establishing the new regulatory regime and setting out funding and priorities for 2019/20 that include helping to deliver on any recommendations from the post-18 review
- **5 steps to improving access.** The Universities Minister outlined five steps to improving access and participation in a speech to Nottingham Trent University, steps which include a clearer focus on what works, evaluating the evidence, increasing collaboration and thinking about retention and success as much as access and participation
- **Looking for improvement.** Universities UK published its response to the independent enquiry looking into the TEF, the first phase of which closes this week, outlining a number of concerns including cost, admin, weightings, failure to grab student attention and calling for the subject level assessments to be put on hold

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Week ending Friday 22 February 2019
• **What Works.** The Office for Students announced the creation of a new independent centre to look at what works in improving access and participation and which might help universities evaluate their own approaches as it launched its latest guidance for developing access and participation plans

• **Graduate contribution statement.** The Russell Group and MomeySavingExpert.com called for views on a redesigned student loan statement that they had been working on which they felt offered a more helpful and accurate picture of what a graduate actually owed

• **Excuse me I have a complaint.** The Office of the Independent Adjudicator published a range of case studies lodged following last year’s industrial action where for example students had lost teaching time or missed out on support, to illustrate what sort of cases had arisen and how they were being dealt with

• **New panel members.** The Office for Students announced the names of the five new students selected to join its student panel for 2019

• **Bumps ahead.** Rachel Wolf, former Downing Street education adviser, argued in a new comment piece that consensus over HE policy was ending and universities needed to plan for a potentially more volatile future

**FE/Skills**

• **Managing centre assessment.** Ofqual launched consultation on some changes to how awarding organisations manage and oversee centre assessment with the aim of ensuring greater clarity and coherent minimum standards

• **How to make T levels a success.** Policy Exchange reflected on past efforts to develop a high quality alternative route for young people and put forward a number of useful suggestions for ensuring T levels avoid any past mistakes

• **In transition.** The DfE launched a short procurement exercise to find a body that can help develop a transition programme for 16 yr olds who are not quite ready to start a T level yet but who may be able to achieve one in time

• **L4/5 market.** The government published a commissioned report on the current qualification and provider market for Level 4/5 peppered with extensive stats on the size and range of the market and outline of some of the issues involved in operating within it

• **Blaze a Trail.** The government released a range of support materials aimed variously at employers, apprentices and social media and intended to help spread the word about the importance of apprenticeships during next week’s National Apprenticeship Week

• **Buckets of Water.** Association of Colleges (AoC) director Julian Gravatt welcomed next week’s National Apprenticeship Week but suggested that funding limits, economic uncertainty and allocation issues could all dampen some of the campaign fires

• **Letter from the President.** This year’s President of the Association of Colleges (AoC) Steve Frampton published an open letter to members outlining the range of work being undertaken to make the case for more investment for colleges along with current activity proposed to help raise college profiles

• **Local Industrial Strategies.** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation examined how Local Industrial Strategies could help deliver inclusive growth, arguing that they needed to focus on four priorities: improving skills and progression for people; investing in infrastructure; targeting growth sectors; and valuing place

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• **Career choices.** The Sutton Trust reported on its survey of parents about apprenticeships showing that many, particularly professionals, were likely to advise their children to go to uni rather than take up an apprenticeship, although others said with more information, they might advise the apprenticeship route

• **Career concerns.** The Career Colleges Trust published new survey results showing many young people questioned unsure about their future careers and feeling that the current education system places too much emphasis on league tables and academic grades rather than supporting their wider needs

• **Digi skills.** The Guardian highlighted the dearth of skilled IT professionals as the government’s plans to digitalize and transform public services continue apace

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**Schools**

• **Managing relationships.** The government issued new guidance for schools in England covering relationship, sex and health education along with a small sum of money (£6m) to help with future training and resources as it responded to consultation undertaken last year

• **Supply and demand.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published the first of what’s intended to be a series of monitoring reports on the teacher labour market in England, indicating that teacher shortages especially in shortage subjects remain a concern in secondary and that stress and working conditions remain issues for the profession as a whole

• **Baseline assessment.** The government set out the framework for its proposed reception baseline assessment, a 20 minute set of tasks that 5 year olds will take at the start of reception and due to be piloted from this Sept despite criticisms from many in the profession

• **Missing a language.** The BBC reported on its survey of language learning in UK schools finding take-up in some subjects such as French and German at an 18 yr low with no GCSE entries at all in some parts of the country

• **Speedier broadband.** The government announced that more rural primary schools would benefit from its Local Full Fibre Networks scheme intended to improve broadband connection in rural areas

• **Not in tune.** The DfE announced that the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) had been selected to develop the new non-statutory model music curriculum leaving some music professionals to express concern about the Board’s lack of classroom experience

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**Tweets(s) of the week**

• “The question is always, is this a problem of technology or a problem about how we deploy [it]? ...Technology intensity currently is not producing better outcomes.” - @CommonsEd

• “One in five teachers feels tense about their job most or all of the time – compared with just 13% of people in other professions, finds @TheNFER” - @tes

• “Becoming increasingly frustrated with CPD labelled as ‘Wellbeing’. A shoulder massage from a colleague (please don’t touch me) or blowing bubbles is not going to make staff wellbeing better because it does nothing to address the cause of the problem. It’s also not CPD” - @TLPMsF

• “Subject-level #TEF will cost close to £250,000 per university - and will still not tell us much about the quality of teaching. Time to scrap it? - @Phil_Baty

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*Policy Eye*

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“How can I convince my daughter not to leave the profession? She’s spent 3 days marking 150 assessments and will spend today planning 5 lessons. Tomorrow she has parents’ evening until 8pm. What a waste...she’s a great teacher” -@ReesCM4

Other stories of the week

• Will you be my teacher? The practice of using pupils to take part in some of the selection processes for teachers has been around for some time and remains contentious for many but how do pupils see their ideal teacher? Teach First asked some secondary school pupils with perhaps the favourite being this response from a 12 yr old: ‘a mixture of Jackie Chan and Pep Guardiola with strong organizational skills and definitely not lazy.’ Many teachers can tick at least some of those boxes. A link to the story is here

• Rules for our time? In a fascinating piece of research, researchers at the Oxford Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology have unearthed what are considered to be seven moral rules adopted in cultures across the world and time and arguably offering equal resonance today. They include: help your family; help your group; return favours; be brave; defer to superiors; divide resources fairly; respect others’ property. A link to the story is here

Quote(s) of the week

• “University as a foundational experience is not in their DNA” – Rachel Woolf suggest that Labour leaders don’t have the same hinterland on higher ed as many of their predecessors

• “It is however hard to gather conclusive evidence of its contribution to teaching and learning experience and outcomes” – Universities UK finds little to support in its evidence to the enquiry on the TEF

• “A glorious new world of deep education awaits” – Sir Anthony Seldon writes the Foreword for Nesta’s new report on the use of AI in schools and colleges

• “I sense real growing momentum for our cause”- Association of Colleges President Steve Frampton reports on progress in the Love Our Colleges campaign

• “In 2017, there were 37 local authorities in England where the total number of GCSE equivalent exam entries was less than the number at one public schools – Eton” – the BBC reports on its survey of modern foreign language provision in UK schools

• “Almost twenty years on from the last time guidance on sex education was updated, there is a lot to catch up on” – the Education Secretary introduces the latest government guidance on sex education

Number(s) of the week

• 13 out of 48. The number of subject rankings in the latest QS World University Rankings in which UK universities took the top position, up three on last year, according to the latest official rankings

• 193. How many pages a higher ed institution might have to submit as part of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) exercise, according to the Times Higher

• 192,100. The number of apprenticeship starts reported for the first quarter of the academic year up to December 2018, up on the previous year but down on the two years before that, according to the latest official figures

• 209. How many apprentices there are in the DfE, according to an answer in Parliament
• 56%. How many university students said they had experienced unwanted sexual behaviour while at university, according to new research from the charity Brook

• 43%. How many parents were for and how many were against (an even split) using artificial intelligence to mark exams, according to a survey commissioned by Nesta for their latest report on AI

• 54%. How many students questioned felt that schools focused more on academic grades than individual career needs, according to a survey by the Career Colleges Trust

• 80. How many more special schools might be needed over the next decade given the rise in the numbers of pupils with statements, according to FFT Education Datalab

• £24m. How much additional money has been allocated to maintained nursery schools, according to an announcement by government

• 27,000. How many children in England identify as being a gang member, according to a report from the Children’s Commissioner

• 11.3%. How many 16-24 yr olds were listed as NEET (not in education, employment or training) with little evidence of things improving, according to the latest official stats

What to look out for next week
• MPs debate on school funding (Monday)
• National Apprenticeships Week (Monday - Friday)
• National Careers Week (Monday – Saturday)
• Scheduled release of NAO report on Apprenticeships (Wednesday)