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## Policy Eye



### Highlights of week ending Friday 8 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.

A week of celebrations with National Apprenticeship Week, National Careers Week and World Book Day, all taking place this week and attracting varying degrees of comment respectively.

Much of the noise has been around apprenticeships which was excellently showcased in many areas during this week but where a new [report](#) from the National Audit Office brought to a head some of the current underlying issues. Many were familiar, at least to those in the system, but as the AoC's Julian Gravatt put it; 'we have an apprenticeship funding system in which lots of people don't feel they're getting a fair deal.' Managing costs, quality and the market were three clear themes to emerge from the report and reactions.

In Westminster this week, the government [offered funding](#) to help towns and regions beef up local skill levels as part of its Stronger Towns Fund. MPs [debated](#) school funding again but with few firm outcomes, the BEIS Committee [heard](#) from industry reps as part of its Inquiry into automation and the future of work, and the build up to next week's Spring Statement by the Chancellor continued with the [FT](#) and the [Resolution Foundation](#) among others weighing in with their thoughts. Low key but important in setting the future economic landscape, being the general view of the line the Chancellor will take when he presents his Statement next Wednesday, hemmed in as he may be by some important Brexit votes.

It's been an important week too in HE where University Mental Health Day saw the Education Secretary [announce](#) a new taskforce to look particularly at helping with the transition into university life. Elsewhere, the IfS [published](#) an interesting Paper on the variable distribution of government grants and loans, the HE Policy Institute [surveyed](#) students on university financial health, a big talking point recently, and discussion about the post-18 review continued with [interesting thoughts](#) from both sides of the 'fence,' FE and HE, on what should come out of the post-18 review.

In FE and skills, away from apprenticeships, the Sixth Form Colleges Association's latest funding impact [survey](#) made fairly grim reading highlighting cuts to programmes and support. The wider post-16 picture was evident in the latest [Omnibus Survey](#) which showed how providers were coping with change, and talking of coping with change, the Skills Commission [announced](#) a new review of what the skills system needs to do to cope with more change. Lots of talk of change in other words.

Finally, for schools away from school funding, Ofqual [published](#) an interesting blog on exam marking but the big talking point this week has been gangs and knife crime, what to do and where responsibilities lie. There's been considerable discussion, particularly in the pages of The Times, about the role of schools. The government may be awaiting its commissioned Timpson Review but the temperature is rising.



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## Top headlines this week

- 'New league table to highlight employers leading apprenticeship revolution.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Levels of distress and illness among UK students alarmingly high.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'A' levels cut in sixth form funding squeeze.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'We need a reality check about exclusions.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Heads angry at minister's school funding snub.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [Project After](#). The government announced its new Stronger Town Fund intended to offer funds to help local communities develop the skills of their local workforce and generally boost local economic activity in the post-Brexit period
- [Workers' rights](#). The government confirmed that post-Brexit it would protect workers' rights as well as update Parliament on any changes to current EU legislation in this area and bring in a new single market enforcement body to oversee such rights in future
- [Holding to account](#). The Labour Party invited contributions on how local accountability should work under its proposed new National Education Service listing ten questions covering possible roles for core players and components
- [Spring Forward or Fall Back?](#) The Resolution Foundation reflected on some of the conundrums facing the Chancellor as he prepares for his Spring Statement next Wednesday, not least the fact that it may not be the biggest show in town on the day as it comes sandwiched between possible Brexit votes
- [Cyber risks](#). The government issued its latest annual health check report on how top companies are managing cyber risks with over 70% of such companies rating cyber security a high risk but only 46% having dedicated cyber security budgets

### HE

- [Show us the money](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) took a new look at government spending in HE in the form of grants and unpaid loans, looking in particular at how it's spread by subject and institution and how far this aligns with student let alone government interests, highlighting considerable variation in each case
- [Mental health taskforce](#). The Education Secretary announced, as part of University Mental Health Day, the formation of a new student mental health taskforce to look initially at how best to ease the transition into higher education, a process that can be difficult for many people
- [Staying the course](#). The Education Secretary urged universities to do more to encourage students to stay on and complete courses as the HE Statistics Agency published figures for 2017/18 showing some universities and courses faring better than others
- [A viable alternative?](#) The Office for Students (OfS) published a briefing on Degree Apprenticeships and how they were going, noting that while there had been a slow start, the potential for growth was there with the potential also to greatly improve social mobility



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- **Second chance.** Cambridge University announced that it was going to offer some 100 places for more deprived applicants for the first time this year through the 'adjustment' process in clearing
- **Take 5.** Alistair Jarvis, chief executive of Universities UK, set out five tests for what might be considered a positive outcome for HE from the post-18 review, including improving access, choice and skill levels, in a new comment piece on Wonkhe
- **Take 4.** In a similar vein, David Hughes, Chief Exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC) listed four outcomes that he was hoping to see from the forthcoming post-18 review including 'proper' choice for young people coming out of school or college at 18, a clearer recruitment offer to employers and a joined-up support system
- **In sickness and in health** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published another set of findings from its YouthSight survey, this time looking at student views on the financial health of universities where most reckoned their own institution was in sound financial health but equally would want to know if it wasn't and that the government would step in to help if such a situation ever arose
- **Won't work.** Nick Hillman, Director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI,) outlined why one of the proposals rumoured to have been under consideration by the post-18 review, that of raising the exam threshold to a minimum 3D grades, would leave many student groups excluded and wouldn't work in the long run

## FE/Skills

- **National Apprenticeship Week.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) highlighted on a daily basis some of the major events and activities happening as part of National Apprenticeship Week
- **Apprenticeship leader board.** The government announced plans to create 'a leader board' of top rated apprentice employers along with an liP type quality mark for high-quality apprentice employers
- **Nursing degree apprenticeships.** The government issued its formal response to the Education Committee's earlier Inquiry into Nursing Degree Apprenticeships, acknowledging many of the issues raised but not accepting that the funding band should be raised or that the time limit for use of the levy funds should be extended
- **AEB funding rules.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency published the funding rules for adult education budgets (AEB) for 2019/20 along with a summary of the main changes for a year that will see devolved budgets also apply
- **Funding Impact Survey.** The Sixth Form Colleges Association published the results of its recent online survey of the impact of cuts and costs on school sixth forms and colleges, reporting that three-quarters were cutting back on student services, a half were cutting back on modern foreign languages and a third were dropping some STEM subjects
- **Young entrepreneurs.** The government announced plans to help young entrepreneurs, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with the launch of a new review to be led by the Chief Exec of the Prince's Trust and looking into ways of helping young people start up and overcome some of the barriers they face
- **The view from here.** The government published the latest set of findings from its Omnibus Survey, focused this time on post-16 providers and provision and stuffed full of data on everything from the types of qualification taken to provider contributions to reducing workload and improving social mobility



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- [Latest skills system review](#). The Skills Commission along with Policy Connect and the Learning and Work Institute announced a new inquiry into the workings of the skills system, looking in particular at how to ensure a more coherent and responsive system in the light of future challenges
- [Council of Elders](#). Dame Ruth Silver, president of the FE Trust for Leadership (FETL,) argued in a comment piece for the TES that the FE sector might benefit from a group of experienced professionals who could act as guides, mentors, perhaps guardians of the sector and its values

## Schools

- [SEND review](#). Schools Week reported that a group of families who have been campaigning over cuts to funding for special educational needs have won the right to have their case heard in the High Court in June
- [School funding](#). MPs debated school funding following a petition drawn up by a headteacher, with many MPs citing cases of school hardships and financial difficulties in their own constituency but with the School Standards Minister who rounded off the debate, arguing that while things were tight, the system was delivering and the government was putting more money that ever into schools
- [Things we know and things we don't about exam marking](#). Ofqual published a new blog listing eleven things we know about exam marking such as most is now done online and most examiners are teachers, and two things we don't know, such as whether marking or moderation results in better consistency
- [Keeping in tune](#). The Music Commission released the results of its 18 month inquiry into music for schools and young people, calling for more use of new technology in the teaching and learning of music, for Music Education Champions and for schools only to be classed as 'outstanding' if they demonstrate artistic and cultural provision
- [FinTech for Schools Initiative](#). Innovate Finance, the industry body for UK FinTech, launched a new initiative designed to encourage more young people to recognise the importance of digital skills in the workplace and to consider working in the financial services industry

## Tweets(s) of the week

- "People in their Fifties are being called apprentices says Lord Baker as he warns there are fewer young apprentices now than in 2010" - [@SianGriffiths6](#)
- "The skills system has had more visions than Hildegard of Bingen but to no avail" - [@OldDitch](#)
- "Parents with the time to attend meetings and knock up a Victoria sponge will be seen as supportive, parents who don't are seen as "hard to reach", but does any of this help? asks [@susanward30](#) " - [@tes](#)
- "My dream job: Assistant headteacher with responsibility for pointing out the problems with everyone else's ideas but no responsibility for replacing them with better ones" - [@adamboxer1](#)
- "Usual insane scramble and last minute crises over World Book Day outfits. And breathe. Can I go back to bed please?" - [@nicolawoolcock](#)
- "Every Pancake Day while scraping one kid's efforts off the ceiling I remember his Year 4 teacher letting a class of 32 of them flip pancakes. Primary school teachers are absolute nails" - [@gabyhinsliff](#)
- "How much time on Twitter is too much time? Since intro of screen time notifications on iPhone, lots of people have said they're horrified by the time they spend on social media. But what's the limit? My average is about 30 mins a day and I think it's worth it" - [@miss\\_mcinerney](#)



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## Other stories of the week

- Choosing a book. It's been World Book Day this week as many parents know perhaps to their cost. The charity which among other things runs the event, sponsored by National Book Tokens, published a list of suggested books for different age groups to read. A link to the list is [here](#)
- Who wants to be a Millionaire? There have been five winners who have won the million pound prize since the TV series started just over 20 years ago and this week a school teacher from Birmingham very nearly became the sixth. He was just one away but was stumped by the final question which read: 'Which of these UK Prime Ministers never served as foreign secretary: Winston Churchill, Alec Douglas-Home, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan? The answer was Churchill. He did however win the substantial second prize but is going to carry on teaching as indicated [here](#)

## Quote(s) of the week

- "No head teacher goes into education to exclude their pupils – and no head teacher takes the decision to do so lightly" – The Education Secretary responds to claims that school exclusions may have a role to play in the growth of gang violence
- "Is there a person alive who knows what the true equivalent of 3Ds is in the Bulgarian high school exit exams" ' HEPI Director Nick Hillman explains why limiting university access to those with 3 Ds is hardly a runner
- "Watching the often testosterone-fuelled Oxbridge elite engage in a battle of intellects under the watchful eye of Paxman has its charm for about a minute" – a contributor to New Statesman calls for changes to make University Challenge relevant to today's society
- "Careers advice has thankfully moved on from my school days where I once did a multiple-choice test and was told I should work in catering" – the Education Secretary on the changing face of careers advice
- "The average cost of training an apprentice is around double what was expected making it more likely that the programme will overspend in the future" – the National Audit Office reports on the apprenticeships programme
- "The Federation of Awarding Bodies has been warning for some time that the whole quality assurance piece is a mess" – Tom Bewick, Chief Exec of the Federation of Awarding Bodies responds to the NAO report on apprenticeships
- "If funding per pupil had been maintained in value since 2015, there would be £1.7bn more in the system now" – the Opposition rounds off its case for more school funding in a debate in Westminster
- "We have compared marker agreement in seven subjects with the research literature from around the world and marking in England stacks up well" – Ofqual blogs about exam marking

## Number(s) of the week

- £1.6bn. How much money will be available for towns and communities from the Stronger Town Fund but spread over six years, according to the Dept of Communities and Local Government



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- 97%. How many companies surveyed are currently undertaking or planning to undertake digital transformation initiatives generally to increase efficiency and/or customer experience, according to a survey of IT leaders by MuleSoft
- 33.9%. How many university students in a survey suffered from a serious psychological issue for which they felt they needed professional help, according to a survey reported in the Guardian
- 10<sup>th</sup>. Where the UK came out of 50 countries in how well it equipped young people with 21<sup>st</sup> c skills, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Educating for the Future Index (Finland came out on top)
- 67%. How many sixth form and college providers surveyed don't believe that the amount of funding they'll have next year will be enough to ensure high-quality provision across the board, according to a survey by the Sixth Form Colleges Association
- 61%. How many post-16 providers offered or planned to offer Applied General Qualifications, according to the latest DfE Omnibus Survey
- 300,000. How many starts there have now been on the new apprenticeship standards, according to a statement from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)
- 84%. How many parents surveyed raised the issue of their children leaving school with the right skill set, according to a new survey commissioned by Pearson
- £69.95. How much the Sinclair ZX81 personal computer cost when it was first launched just under 40 years ago this week, according to BBC archives

## What to look out for next week

- Education Questions to MPs (Monday)
- Launch of Learning and Work Institute report on lifelong learning and skills (Monday)
- Scheduled Brexit vote (Tuesday)
- The Chancellor's Spring Statement (Wednesday)
- ASCL Annual Conference (Friday/Saturday. Education Secretary presents on Friday)