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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 28 February 2020

(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 standout headline this week but plenty of potential game changers to note all the same.

On the political front, Ministerial responsibilities for the DfE and Committee members for the Education Committee have been listed while two heavy weights have weighed in with their thoughts on the Budget now just over a week away. They include the [Resolution Foundation](#) and the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) each of which has usefully summarised the context facing the Chancellor. Both talk of tough choices but also options. The sense remains that the big decisions will come later, probably with the Spending Review but the potential for some change around fiscal rules at least remains.

For higher education, the Office for Students (OfS) [consultation](#) on options for reform to the admissions system offers the potential for change here. The consultation puts forward three possible options: keeping with the current system but with modifications and two forms of PQA, where either offers or applications happen after exam results are known. They're not the only ones getting to grips with admissions reform, Universities UK and UCAS are both hard at it as well. As for the OfS, they intend to report back this autumn. While on HE, which continues to go through a period of introspection, two other reports out this week have added their thoughts on both the current and future context for the sector. The think tank [Policy Exchange](#) suggests HE is at a crossroads while the [HE Policy Institute](#) has published an interesting assessment of the sector by some leading thinkers offering a more promising route map.

For FE and skills, is the apprenticeship levy in for a change? The Education Secretary has 'ordered' or 'demanded' depending which version you read, a [review](#) of the use of apprenticeship levy funds for top management qualifications such as MBAs, as the Institute for Apprenticeships reported on its review into apprenticeship training costs and launched consultation on reform of some funding bands. It'll be interesting to see if the Chancellor has much to say about apprenticeship funding in the Budget but given feedback on the review of funding higher level training won't happen until June, it may be too early.

While for schools, the Education Endowment Foundation's [review](#) into the virtues or otherwise of an extended Key Stage 4, continuing debate about [the inspection system](#) let alone the [new reception baseline assessment](#) due in from this September, all offer the prospect of further developments if not longer-term change here.

Finally, thank you for responding to our recent consultation on Policy Watch. Please note our comments about the future of Policy Watch at the bottom of this week's briefing.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Climate change: Schools failing us say pupils.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Expanding apprenticeship levy won't help SMEs.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Bosses told to stop spending apprenticeship cash on themselves.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Uni admissions could scrap use of predicted grades.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'DfE reveals new school behavior taskforce.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [The trillion-pound question](#). The Resolution Foundation reported on the big economic picture ahead of the Budget suggesting that depending on fiscal rules, the Chancellor could have some headroom for public spending with state spending potentially even hitting £1trn by 2023/24
- [More Budget questions](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) also outlined its thoughts on choices facing the Chancellor ahead of the Budget noting among other things that taxes are often increased in the first year of a Parliament and how much (£54 bn) would be needed to return public spending (outside health) to real 2010 levels
- [Infrastructure activity](#). The National Infrastructure Commission published its Annual Report noting that while there had been an upsurge of activity in recent weeks with announcements like HS2 the government still needed to develop and deliver a clear National Infrastructure Strategy for the long-term future
- [AI in Education](#). The Institute for Ethical AI in Education published an Interim Report outlining some of the benefits AI can bring to education such as 'delivering autonomous learning recommendations' but also some of the challenges particularly around safeguarding and accessibility, that need to be overcome in developing an ethical framework
- [The benefits of online learning](#). The think tank Demos reported on the importance of online learning both to the economy and to individual people's lives calling among other things for more employees to get paid time off to support defined online learning

HE

- [Admission system options](#). The Office for Students launched consultation on options for reforming the university admissions system for undergraduates in England, listing five principles, ten issues and three potential options including sticking with but modifying the current system or moving to either post-qualification offers and acceptances, or post-qualification applications
- [3Ps](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new report from Sheffield Hallam putting forward a number of significant proposals for taking universities forward and into a new more positive era, built around three 'interlocking ideas': partnerships on local skill development; progression such as making the first year of a degree tuition free for the first in a family to go; and place within local civic structures
- [At the crossroads](#). The Policy Exchange think tank published a new report, based on a number of on and off the record interviews surmising the current mood in UK HE, suggesting that it was at a crossroads and in need of clear, strategic leadership as to ways forward



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- [Levelling Up?](#) Universities UK published a new resource sheet on Level 4/5 calling among other things for the government to give greater recognition and support to such provision
- [When a Minister comes calling.](#) Former HE Ministerial adviser Diana Beech offered more tips for universities looking to work with Ministers and MPs, in this case for when hosting Ministerial visits, with making sure they at least get a comfort break, one of the top ten tips listed

FE/Skills

- [MBA Apprenticeships.](#) The Education Secretary called on the Institute for Apprenticeships to undertake an urgent review into the use of apprenticeship funds and standards being used for managerial level training, asking for a response by 1 June
- [College leadership.](#) The government announced a new £9m College Collaboration Fund to help colleges work together and share good practice on governance and leadership along with £4.5m for bespoke CPD training for college leaders and governors
- [Apprenticeship costs.](#) The Institute for Apprenticeships published its commissioned research into the costs of apprenticeship training and assessment in England, completed last year and intended to strengthen understanding around costs, pointing to programme duration, salaries and classroom costs as the obvious cost drivers
- [Funding consultation.](#) The Institute for Apprenticeships launched consultation on some proposed changes to apprenticeship funding bands, calling for views on two particular issues, the use of weighting factors and the viability of using trailblazer inputs to consider cost variations
- [Out of scope.](#) The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) published commissioned research from the consultancy Public First indicating that extending the scope of the apprenticeship levy to take in more employers would do very little to raise more funds and calling instead for an increased annual budget from government
- [‘A World of Talent.’](#) The Federation of Small Businesses published a new report following the government’s latest immigration proposals, suggesting that many small businesses would struggle to pay the Immigration Skills Charge and calling for a chunk of the National Skills Fund to be made available to help as well as the creation of special visas for areas like social care
- [Beefing up careers.](#) The AELP published a 5-point plan to help improve the careers system in England including incentivizing schools to promote apprenticeships and enforcing the so-called Baker clause introduced to enable skills providers to engage with school pupils and offer careers guidance
- [WorldSkills Centre of Excellence.](#) Worldskills UK announced that it was partnering with NCFE to run a three-year pilot project, starting this September, to help embed skills development and trainer training across the FE sector
- [College maths.](#) The Maths in FE Colleges Project (MIFEC) published the second of its intended three reports on college maths provision looking on this occasion at some of the issues around enacting policy requirements highlighting the importance of college strategies, support and development and the need for a rethink on policy expectations as key factors



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Schools

- **Baseline Assessment.** The government confirmed that the new Reception Baseline Assessment which has been piloted and reviewed over the last two years, will go ahead from this September leading to the scrapping of the KS1 SATs in 2022/23
- **From the Adjudicator.** The Office of the Schools Adjudicator published its annual report for Sept 2018 – Sept 2019 showing some concern still about the effective placing of vulnerable children and noting among the data an increase in home-educated pupils and in requests to vary admission arrangements
- **Behaviour hubs.** The government announced more details of its scheme to help manage poor behaviour and discipline in schools with the creation of a team of dedicated experts who will work with lead schools to share best practice and support
- **Fairer school admissions.** The Sutton Trust published two new reports into the school admissions system looking particularly at ways to make the school system less segregated with views mixed about the use of random ballots, banding tests and prioritising disadvantaged pupils
- **Two years or three?** The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) announced plans to work with the National Foundation of Educational Research (NFER) to examine the virtues or otherwise of a 3-year KS4 v a 3-year KS3
- **Costing teaching assistants.** The Education Policy Institute examined the costing and deployment of teaching assistants who now constitute a quarter of the school workforce and whose impact can be valuable in many ways but where questions about system use and efficiency remain
- **Read the question.** GL Assessment reported on its work on reading skills suggesting that in many cases, poor reading skills were hindering students' performance in GCSEs, notably maths, and highlighting case study evidence of schools that have managed to raise reading levels
- **Keeping children safe.** The government launched consultation on beefing up support for children most in need through the development of dedicated school leaders who could share information and provide a greater focus on helping children achieve intended outcomes
- **Improving inspection.** The Policy Exchange think tank followed up its 2014 report into Ofsted noting some of the developments since including of course a new inspection framework but making a number of recommendations about Ofsted's role and approach that could help make things better
- **Ofsted consultation.** The Association of Schools and College Leaders (ASCL) published its response to the government consultation on removing the exemption for schools judged outstanding by Ofsted, calling for the different treatment of providers inspected before and after 2015 to be removed and highlighting further work it was doing on improving the accountability system
- **Early Career support.** Teach First outlined the expert programme it was developing to support the roll out of the Early Career Framework in parts of the North this autumn ahead of a national launch next year
- **Climate change.** Teach the Future, a student group formed last autumn to refocus the education system around environmental issues, outlined its 'asks,' including a Climate Emergency Act, sustainable school buildings and a government commissioned curriculum review, as it prepared to host a meeting with MPs
- **Reading tool.** Capita launched its Literacy 360 survey, a software tool designed to monitor and measure children's progress and attitude towards reading, identifying for example those that might need more help, as they move through Key Stages 2 and 3



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Tweets(s) of the week.

- “Perhaps the greatest financial inefficiency in England’s schools is our bizarre accountability system. School leaders have no option but to ‘squander’ their most precious resource – time to meet its insatiable needs. @steve_munby and @RealGeoff Baryon have written well on this” - @joehallg
- “It’s tiresome that the government keeps announcing small pockets of money that colleges must bid for. I’m not convinced they understand the time and resources that go into constant bid writing. It would be far easier to fund colleges properly so they can collaborate without bids!” - @EmmaHardyMP
- “Half of headteachers admit social segregation is a problem in state schools, study finds” - @ed_ontap
- “Primary school children banned from heading in football training” - @SkyNews
- “Whilst working on an assignment it struck me, how on earth did students cope before the invention of post-it notes and highlighter pens?” - @bundy201065

Other stories of the week

- Online learning habits. The think tank Demos published a new report this week on online learning in the UK. It offers a fascinating picture of learning habits and topics by age and by region. For example, people in East Anglia perhaps unsurprisingly tend to log on for things to do with bird watching while in London it’s for lock picking! Overall the most searched for skill online is anything to do with cooking followed by help with DIY and how to fix things. A link to the report can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “Britain’s universities claim to be the envy of the world. Their admissions process, however, near-unique in its tortuousness, is not” –The Times leader considers the latest proposals for reform of the university admissions system
- “I’ve asked Universities Minister Michelle Donelan and the new Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, Gillian Keegan, to work hand-in-glove on building a truly world-class post-16 offer for our young people” – the Education Secretary outlines the roles for the new Ministers in the DfE
- “I am unconvinced that having an apprenticeship standard that includes an MBA paid for by the levy is in the spirit of our reformed apprenticeships or provides value for money” – the Education Secretary calls for a review of MBA apprenticeships
- “If I’m elected as leader, I will put a National Education Service at the heart of a vision that can be our path to power” – Labour leadership hopeful Rebecca Long-Bailey talks to the TES
- “The sector is not in crisis, but it could be, if action is not taken.” The Policy Exchange think tank reports on the mood in UK HE
- “We would actively encourage as many secondary schools as possible to participate in this important project by completing the survey sent to schools today” – NFER encourage secondary schools in England to participate in a new research project on the durations of KS3 and KS4



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Number(s) of the week

- £10bn. How much 'headroom' the Chancellor may have to play with under the current fiscal rules when he presents his Budget, according to a report from the Resolution Foundation
- £90,000. The value of expired apprenticeship levy funds for the month of January 2020, according to an answer in Parliament
- 10%. How much of the UK economy can be linked to the effects of online learning, according to a new report from the think tank Demos
- £8,655. The overall mean cost of an apprenticeship training and assessment programme, according to a new report by IFF Research conducted for the Institute for Apprenticeships
- 60,544. How many children were reported as being home educated last year, up over 12% on the year before, according to the annual report from the Office for Schools Adjudicator
- £130. Average weekly costs for a part-time nursery place for a child under two in England, according to a new report from the children's charity Coram

What to look out for next week

- Education Questions to Ministers (Monday)
- Launch of Skills Commission report on 'The Future of the Skills system.' (Monday)
- FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference (Monday, Tuesday)

And finally,

Thank you also to everyone who responded to the recent survey and we are grateful for all of your feedback. Policy Watch will be taking a break for the next few weeks while we look at how we can continue to improve and update the newsletter. Watch this space for more on Policy Watch.