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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 21 April 2017



(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 prizes for guessing the main news item this week but plenty of prizes for guessing what lies behind it, what lies ahead of it and where it leaves education and skills? Three big questions that have already attracted a lot of comment.

On the first question, what brought the sudden change of heart three weeks after the latest dismissal of a snap election, political pundits seem to have settled on four reasons. These include: the need to shore up a majority ahead of some difficult negotiations on anything from grammars to Brexit; seizing the pause before Brexit negotiations begin; avoiding taking eyes off the ball and holding an election in 2019/20 when exit arrangements are likely to be under negotiation; and a favourable current position in the polls.

On the second, what lies ahead, key dates include: 3 May, the dissolution of Parliament; 4 May, local and mayoral elections; 22 May, the last date to register to vote and 8 June, D Day itself. Party manifestos will start to appear in early May. With the first round of the French election due this Sunday, the EU Council meeting to endorse Brexit principles on 29 April, negotiations beginning in mid-June and the German election due on 24 September, we're in for an intense summer of elections and European activity.

On the third question, where does it all leave education and skills, there are two dimensions: current stuff and future stuff.

On current stuff, there are six bits of unfinished business. Some may get through in the final week of business but at present, this is how it's looking. Schools White Paper = grammars likely to be included in the manifesto and a government response issued in the summer. Schools funding = unlikely for 2018/19 now, its future dependent on how it plays out in the election; young people's mental health = likely to be in manifestos and a possible autumn Green Paper; FE Bill = back in the Commons for final review of amendments, in with a chance of completing; HE Bill = number of issues outstanding and completion dependent on last minute deals; Industrial Strategy = subsumed into manifestos.

And future stuff? All of the above are likely to feature in manifestos in some form. At the last general election, the Conservatives had 38 education pledges, Labour 37 and the Lib-Dems nearly 50. We're unlikely to see the same volume in this so-called Brexit election but we will see some pretty fundamental education issues raised all the same. These include: the case for selective schooling and its impact on social mobility; school funding levels and teacher recruitment issues; skill levels and training provision post Brexit; lifelong learning and 21st century skill needs; student visas and work permits; higher ed provision in a global market. A lot to play for.

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Top headlines this week

- ‘Teachers opt not to disrupt primary tests.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘General election will give schools an organizational headache.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Schools to be left in funding limbo until new government formed, DfE reveals.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Agency boss writes warning letter to all college principals.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Students’ Well-Being](#). The OECD published the first comprehensive assessment of student well-being across OECD countries, based on data collected as part of the PISA 2015 Science ‘tests’ and showing many 15 yr olds broadly happy with their lives but with concerns particularly in the UK about tests, bullying and time spent online
- [UK2030](#). The CBI called on the government to help cut regional productivity gaps by 15% by 2030 and to set up an independent body to monitor progress as part of its response to the government’s recent Industrial Strategy for which consultation closed this week
- [Sleepwalking into obscurity](#). The CIPD issued a new report on the skills challenge as part of its response to the Industrial Strategy arguing that a couple of decades of low investment and confused policy development had left the UK sleep walking into a low –value, low-skills economy

HE

- [Is that it for the HE Bill?](#) The HE Policy Institute outlined some of the tricky issues that may prevent the current HE Bill from getting through Parliament in time now that the general election has been called
- [Further thoughts on the HE Bill](#). Wonkhe offered its thoughts not just on the prospects for the HE Bill but other developments as well in the light of the election announcement

FE/Skills

- [Our plan](#). The Institute for Apprenticeships published its updated Operating Plan for 2017/18 explaining how its quality, regulatory and other functions will operate
- [In the chair](#). The Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) announced the names of the chairs for the 15 panel routes that will advise the Institute on occupational standards
- [Now’s not the time to stop](#). The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) argued for the planned implementation of apprenticeship arrangements to continue as it responded to the government’s announcement of a snap general election
- [Mental health and apprenticeships](#). The Education and Training Foundation published three case studies showcasing good practice as part of a new module covering inclusion and diversity in apprenticeships



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Schools

- [Primary school places](#). Parents have been hearing this week whether their children have a place at their preferred primary school with nearly 90% apparently getting their first choice although the full picture will not be available for a couple of weeks
- [Regional challenges](#). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published the second in its series of reports into the Regional Schools Commissioner areas highlighting the different range of challenges in different regions and questioning whether there was sufficient capacity to cope
- [Doorstep Manifesto](#). The Head teachers' Roundtable group who have confirmed that their forthcoming review of government education policy will be brought forward to provide a 'Doorstep Manifesto' for the June election and will be officially launched next weekend
- [If creative pupils can go to performing arts schools, why can't we have selective schools for clever clogs?](#) Schools Week editor, Laura McInerney explained in an article in the Guardian why it's not as simple

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Blimey first day as ASCL_UK general secretary for @RealGeoff Barton and the PM calls a general election!" - @johndunford
- "Most teens are happy with their lives but schoolwork, anxiety and bullying are issues #OECDPISA" - @SchleicherOECD
- "No one has ever been convinced about anything by a tweet. Except for something they already agreed with" - @richardosman

Other stories of the week

- Middle child syndrome. What do Mark Zuckerberg, Lord Sugar and Bill Gates all have in common? They're all middle children and according to research from America, middle children are 30% more likely to end up as Chief Execs than their siblings because they have to fight the hardest to get attention and this stands them in good stead for a top job. Apparently, according to the research, eldest children most often up as rock stars or scientists while youngest ones tend towards being composers or explorers.
- The vision from F8. F8 is Facebook's annual big convention when social media experts from across the globe come together to predict the future for their industry. The Guardian carried a [helpful summary](#) of the top eight trends for those of us who find it all far removed

Quote(s) of the week

- "I have only recently and reluctantly come to this position" – Theresa May explains her late conversion to holding a snap general election
- "In recent months we have seen growing momentum for our School Funding campaign...it is important that this momentum is not lost" – NAHT general secretary Russell Hobby positions school funding as a key election issue



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- “They will pay as much attention to us as we do to ants” – German computer scientist Jurgen Schmidhuber reflects on a future under robots
- “Nothing has changed with regard to schools being held to account for the proportion of children achieving strong pass and we are working with Ofqual to support teachers as we implement the new system” – the DfE seeks to reassure teachers at their Easter conferences worried about the new GCSE grading scale
- “Keeping a stiff upper lip can damage health” – Prince William reflects in a new interview on mental health concerns
- “On average, there’s a bully in every class” – the OECD reports on issues worrying teens
- “The monster that is stalking our schools” – a delegate at the National Union of Teachers’ Conference expresses her views on primary school SATs
- “The priority placed on individualism has led to inefficient approaches that increase teacher workload for no obvious gain” – education commentator Greg Ashman tackles educational progressivism

Number(s) of the week

- 522. The number of MPs who supported the motion calling for a snap general election with 13 voting against
- 2%. The growth forecast for the UK economy for 2017, up 0.5% on its previous forecast with the forecast for 2018 also increased to 1.5%, according to latest figures from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- 52%. The number of British adults who support a policy of admitting more immigrants to undertake highly skilled jobs although there was less (18%) support for admitting migrants for lower-skilled jobs according to a poll by Ipsos Mori and Kings College
- 25%. How many more trainee teachers university and school training providers will be allowed to recruit for this September
- 2 hours+. How many hours 15 yr olds across OECD countries spend on average online each weekday after school (the figure is almost three times higher for UK teens) according to the latest research from the OECD/PISA
- 59%. The number of adults who said they’d turn to a book at times of stress or illness according to a survey by the Reading Agency to mark World Book Night this Sunday

What to look out for next week

- World Book Night (Sunday)
- Social Market Foundation panel event with FETL on issues facing FE (Wed)
- National Association of Secondary Moderns Conference (Thursday)
- National Association of Head teachers (NAHT) Annual Conference (Friday - Sunday)