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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 22 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.

While the clocks tick away elsewhere, education continues to get on and plan for the future, whatever that may be, with a number of important Reports and Papers out this week.

The government kicked things off with two important Reports this week. First, the launch of a new [International Education Strategy](#) with ambitious targets to increase both the number of international students in UK higher ed and the value of UK education exports generally. It's a Strategy with implications across the education spectrum from early years to higher ed. Second, it followed this up a few days later with a batch of Papers on non GCSE and A' level qualifications, issued as part of a first stage consultation on future funding for so-called [Level 3 and below qualifications](#). Again another important piece of work that will run into next year and beyond and with potential funding implications for many school and colleges.

Other Reports out this week have included the recommendations from the [Independent Commission for Lifelong Learning](#). This was set up a couple of years ago by Sir Vince Cable and is one of a growing number of reports into this area. The favoured solution, if this Report is anything to go by, remains a form of Learning Account. Other Reports this week have seen the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) and Kaplan highlight the [financial contributions of international graduates](#) who have remained in the UK to work, the [Resolution Foundation](#) look at skill development and particularly the need for more higher level technical skills, and the [Association of Employment and Learning Providers \(AELP\)](#) propose significant changes to the way in which the apprenticeship levy operates. Removing degree apprenticeships from the scope of the levy is the headline proposition in a Paper prepared for a Public Accounts Committee evidence session next week.

Elsewhere the Education Secretary has intervened in higher ed as promised and launched an attack on pay companies that process the payments of essay writing outfits, the Office for Students has been approaching its first birthday with reflections on all sides, the DfE launched the procurement process for the next wave of T levels and the Bake Off judge Prue Leith called for packed lunches to be banned and for staff and students to be able to sit down and eat together. Oh and with no mobile phones round the table.

But it's that consultation on non GCSE and A' level qualifications, Level 3 and below in the jargon, that is the stand-out this week. It forms part of the government's plans to rationalise the qualification provision for post-16 and clarify the space for the incoming T levels with funding an important lever. The case for change is set out in an accompanying Report and lists six priorities, most of which such as the need for a more coherent and progressive offer, are well-known and are followed through with details on costs and volumes in an Impact Assessment Report. The consultation poses a number of fairly open-ended questions but as many have remarked, the devil will be in the ensuing detail and that'll come early next year.



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Top headlines this week

- 'T level contracts worth more than £30m up for grabs.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Qualifications must have currency in the job market.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'PayPal urged to block essay firm cheats.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Knife crime: truancy bigger concern than exclusions, says Hinds.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Every school needs a dog as stress buster.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Global intent](#). The government published its new International Education Strategy pledging to support key sectors and regions, appoint an International figure to lead developments, and to increase the number of international students coming here to study by more than 30% by 2030
- [PESA toppings](#). The Independent Commission on Lifelong Learning, set up by Vince Cable, published its report calling for a system of PESAs (Personal Education and Skills Accounts,) opened at age 18 and topped up by government at 3 stages in life to help generate a culture of lifelong learning
- [New Filters](#). The All Party Parliamentary Group looking into the impact of social media on young people published its findings, calling among other things for the creation of a Social Media 'Health' Body, funded by a 0.5% levy on social media company profits to help establish any evidence of causation and develop a code of conduct
- [In sickness and in health](#). Three leading health bodies highlighted worrying gaps in the health and social care workforce in a new report listing a series of policy actions needed, such as covering tuition fees of nurses and better skills training and support all round, ahead of a formal workforce implementation plan due to be published later this year
- [CDEI Strategy](#). The Centre for Data Ethics (CDEI,) an advisory body set up by government to provide advice on maximizing the benefits of data and artificial intelligence, published a 2-year work plan of reviews, research and analysis that it will undertake over the next couple of years as data and AI become increasingly important
- [A Living Wage](#). Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS,) outlined the context behind what he described as 'the most interesting announcement' in last week's Spring Statement, namely an widespread review into the effects of minimum wages

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- [Global potential, global growth](#). The government published its latest International Education Strategy promising to increase the numbers of international students in UK higher education and increase the value of UK education exports from early years to Edtech over the next decade
- [International worth](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) and Kaplan published new commissioned research into the financial contributions of international students who stay on and work in the UK after graduation, showing that each cohort contributes some £3.2bn in extra tax revenues and add considerably to the economy and society in many ways



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- **'Beat the Cheats.'** The Education Secretary called on payline companies to stop processing payments for essay writing companies and for universities to adopt an 'honour code' to help tackle the issue of essay mills
- **Happy Birthday.** Alex Bols, Deputy Chief Exec at GuildHE, heralded the first year of the Office for Students (OfS) in a blog on the Wonkhe website, noting some of its achievements but looking for progress in the future on such matters as speed of response, registration fee levels and limits to regulation burdens
- **In the hot seat.** University Business carried a detailed interview with Office for Students' Chief Executive Nicola Dandridge where she reflected on her first year in charge, the speed with which the OfS had become a functioning organisation, and some of the challenges that lie ahead
- **First generations show the way.** The BBC reported on a study from Brunel University highlighting how important, in terms of acting as role models and encouraging other family members to follow, the first members of a family to go to university can be
- **Physics bursaries.** The Institute for Physics announced a new bursary scheme, funded by the award winning Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell and aimed at increasing the number of female researchers particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds

FE/Skills

- **Qualification Review.** The government launched the first stage of its major review into post-16 qualifications at Level 3 and below, looking in particular at the criteria for funding such qualifications in future, the case for reform and the likely impact of such funding changes
- **Apprenticeship funding.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) called for degree apprenticeship funding to be removed from the levy system and for increased levy contributions generally to ensure entitlement funding for L 2 and 3 programmes
- **Quality practice.** The Quality Alliance of regulatory bodies published a brief Quality Strategy for apprenticeships setting out a number of essential before, during and after best practice procedures covering working together, training and assessment
- **Next round of T level contracts.** The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) launched the bid process to develop the next batch of T levels, covering further lines in Construction, Digital, and Health and Science, and due to start in 2021
- **Pick up the pace.** The Resolution Foundation published a new report arguing that while education attainment and skill levels had improved over the last 25 years, progress had slowed recently with Brexit perhaps providing an opportunity to pick up the pace again, particularly at L3 and upwards where such skills may well be in great demand
- **Workforce Data Collection.** The government issued a new consultation on improving the data collected on the FE workforce following last year's Call for Evidence with the aim of simplifying and better managing what's collected and when
- **5 pillars.** Roy O'Shaughnessy, Chief Exec of the Capital City College Group in London, outlined in a blog on the Collab Group website, five principles or pillars such as highlighting particularly through students, the returns to the taxpayer in terms of jobs and skills on investment, that could help ensure the true value of FE is recognised



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Schools

- **Ed Psychs.** The government announced a new £30m+ scheme to help train and develop more Educational Psychologists as a new report suggested a significant recent drop in their numbers
- **Report on the OCC.** The government published the results of the 'tailored' review into the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC,) giving it a clean bill of health and confirming the importance of its role in the future
- **Live Music.** The Dept for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) Committee published its report into live music, recommending among other things that music and the creative arts be added as a sixth pillar for the EBacc
- **More than a Score.** The group campaigning for changes to the assessment regime for children published the results of its recently commissioned survey showing many heads and parents concerned about the stress that the testing regime puts on children, and calling for the system to be reviewed
- **Leading together.** OECD Education Director Andreas reported on the recent International Summit on the Teaching Profession and the range of challenges facing teachers across the world from ensuring schools remain relevant, to parents and society continuing to place trust in them and young people supported with the values and knowledge for the future

Tweets(s) of the week

- "We're not just SEND, we are human beings. Remember that fact," says Ben #send #edselcttee" - @tes
- "Colleges are in a better place than prior to any of the spending reviews of the past decade and more" -@tesfenews
- "If BTECs didn't exist they would need to be invented. So many young people want to continue their general education at 16 and they have incredible value in respect to social mobility" - @BrettFreeman67
- "Schoolchildren will carry backpacks with inbuilt air quality sensors to help monitor levels of pollution in London" - @BBCLondonNews
- "How to squeeze every last drop from revision...Sniff a lemon or squeeze your ear to pass exams, pupils told" -@nicolawoolcock
- "The Patron Saint of copying people into emails is St Francis of a C.C." -@iamscassidy

Other stories of the week

- 'Cos I'm happy.' Pharrell Williams sung about it, David Cameron wanted to measure it, Gallup has a World Poll that analyses it all and the UN has a special day each year to celebrate it, but happiness can be an elusive ideal. The UN's latest International Day of Happiness occurred on Wednesday this week and according to its latest World Happiness Report, we in the UK are quite a happy lot. It may not feel like it at the moment but apparently we came 15th out of 156 countries in the happiness rankings, even higher than last year. Scandinavian countries did particularly well. If you feel you like you need cheering up, some suggestions are included in the BBC story accompanying the World Happiness Report which can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

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- “We have no intention to re-introduce a cap on the number of students accessing post-18 education” – the Universities Minister responds to a question in Parliament on the post-18 review
- “A lot of unhappiness that is being heard is about skewed distribution...we are resolving that but it will take time” – the Chancellor offer his take on school funding on the Marr Show
- “It’s an end-of-the-tether moment”- former Education Secretary Estelle Morris reflects on school cuts and child poverty
- “It’s not the sort of job you get bored in, that’s for sure” – Office for Students Chief Executive Nicola Dandridge on life as the Chief Exec one year into the role
- “The fee these crooks charge depends on the length, the standard you are looking for and the deadline you are facing” – Chris Husbands, V.C. at Sheffield Hallam University, on the scourge of essay writing companies
- “It’s horrible not knowing” – university students worry about whether their international exchange programmes will go ahead until Brexit is resolved
- “We expect, as a result of the review, that there will be far fewer qualifications at these levels approved for funding post-16 than is the case at present” – the government sets out its expectations as it launches its initial review of L3 and below qualifications in England
- “I would like to have gone back and studied maths probably” – Sir Vince Cable on what he would do if he became a recipient of one of his proposed Personal Education and Skills Accounts

Number(s) of the week

- 222,000. How much employment increased by in the three months up to January 2019, the biggest increase since November 2015, according to the latest Office for National Statistics figures
- 600,000. The number of international students the government is hoping to attract each year by 2030, up from 460,000, according to its latest International Strategy
- £150m pa. How much the current restrictions on international students being able to stay on and work after graduation cost the Treasury each year, according to a new report by the HE Policy Institute and Kaplan
- £1.3bn pa. How much a system of Personal Education and Skills Accounts for 18+ yr olds might initially cost, according to the Independent Commission on Lifelong Learning
- 13. How many colleges in England were awarded funding as part of the latest round of bids under the Strategic College Improvement Fund, according to a press notice from the government
- 21%. How many qualifications for 16-19 yr olds have been added within the last couple of years, according to the DfE in its consultation on Level 3 and below qualifications
- 314,000. How many enrolments there were in 2016/17 on Level 3 and below qualifications that would probably not meet the future funding criteria, according to the Impact Assessment report for the L3 qualifications and below consultation
- 4.8%. The school absence rate from state funded schools last year, up slightly on the year before, according to latest DfE figures
- 7,000. How many schools are using the DfE’s free teaching vacancies service, according to latest figures



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- 1.4m. How many young people around the world took part in last Friday's school strikes for climate action, according to campaign leaders

What to look out for next week

- Public Accounts Committee witness session on apprenticeships (Monday)
- FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference (Wednesday, Thursday)
- British Chambers of Commerce Annual Conference (Thursday)
- Headteachers' Roundtable Summit (Friday)
- AELP Spring Conference (Friday)