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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 15 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.

Plenty happening around Westminster of course this week but it's also been busy around education.

At the start of the week, MPs **plied** Education Ministers with questions about school funding, special needs, technical education and post-18 funding in their regular questioning session. The day after, the Education Committee **tackled** Ofqual on exam pressures, exam reforms, iGCSEs and BTECs among other things in its latest accountability hearing. And of course in the middle of the week and in the midst of other intense political activity the Chancellor **delivered** his Spring Statement with many in education listening intently for optimistic augurs, (pun intended.) More on this in a minute.

In other news this week, we've seen two important reports published, **one** by the Learning and Work Institute on UK skills and the **other** by Ofsted on knife crime and the role of key agencies including schools. Elsewhere the government released a new report on digital competition while the National Crime Agency launched a new series of animations to help teach young children about some of the risks from being online.

In HE, the MillionPlus group **considered** a new system for Tier 4 student visas and Sir Anthony Seldon in an emotive blog, **called** for new, visionary leadership for the sector. In FE, Sir Frank McLoughlin **highlighted** the importance of College Chairs and Governors who often help hold things steady at times of great change while in schools, the government **announced** more free school places and the Nuffield Foundation **reported** on its study of maths anxiety. And on a lighter note, 3-piece suites are out and electric toothbrushes in, at least according to the latest official list of household items to be used to measure consumer price inflation.

But back to the Chancellor's Spring Statement, the most important item of news for education this week.

The Spring Statement is of course more a report on the nation's finances than an occasion for major spending announcements – that comes later in the Autumn Budget. Those finances apart, which the Chancellor readily talked up, there was a fair bit of interest for education and skills with references to Augar, T levels, apprenticeships, and growth deals along with new funding for sanitary products in schools, fighting knife crime and for science and technology.

Attention now shifts to the Spending Review which the Chancellor announced will be launched before the summer recess and report with the Autumn Budget. The hope is that the healthier public finances the Chancellor indicated, potentially around £26bn+ albeit with Brexit caveats, will provide a more optimistic context. As Torsten Bell, director of the Resolution Foundation put it: 'this marks a major shift to focusing on how much more we should spend, rather than how deeply to cut.' Perhaps some good news at last.

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Top headlines this week

- 'UK will drop in world literacy and numeracy table.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Knife crime: Schools not responsible, says Ofsted.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Chancellor brings forward £700m apprenticeship package.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Maths anxiety causing fear and despair in children as young as six.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Hinds unveils latest plan to create happy teachers.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Spring Statement](#). The Chancellor delivered his Spring Statement arguing that the economy was continuing to grow, that borrowing and debt would continue to fall and that a potential dividend awaited a successful conclusion to Brexit
- [IfS on the Spring Statement](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies offered its traditional analysis of the Chancellor's latest financial statement, outlining the good and not so good news, the shift in spending towards health, pensions and social care and the need to consider investment in public services in general
- [Unlocking digital competition](#). The Digital Competition Expert Panel, commissioned by the Chancellor last year, issued its final report calling for an opening up of the market through the creation of a new 'digital market unit' that would set codes of conduct and enforce greater data mobility and openness
- [A Marshall Plan for Skills](#). Chuka Umunna, one of the founders of the Independent Group of MPs, set out some personal thoughts about policy priorities in a new pamphlet, calling among other things for the means testing of university tuition fees and using some of the money saved for a new Skills Plan and secondly proposing a compulsory Citizen's Service for school leavers
- [No idling](#). Public Health England published a new report on how to improve air quality and public health, highlighting the problems arising out of the school run and proposing that more children should be encouraged to bike or walk to school and drivers banned from running car engines outside school gates
- [Jessie and friends](#). The National Crime Agency launched a new campaign using a series of animations about Jessie and her friends to help parents and teachers teach children aged 4-7 about the risks of online grooming and other potential dangers

HE

- [Spring Statement](#). The Chancellor confirmed that the Augar review would be published shortly and announced visa exemptions from this autumn for PhD occupations along with additional funding for a number of science and tech projects
- [Tier 4 visas](#). Million Plus reported on the current 'expensive and bureaucratic system' proposing instead a system of provisional 'approval in principle' visas at the point of entry and/or cutting out some of the bureaucracy such as credibility interviews from the current system



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- **Care leavers.** The government called on universities to help young people leaving care and considering higher education by helping them with accommodation, books and support generally as part of a new set of Principles
- **Cri de Coeur.** Sir Anthony Seldon lamented the 'battering' UKHE was currently facing and called, in a blog for the HE Policy Institute (HEPI,) for a new positive and authoritative voice for UKHE able to challenge current critical perceptions and demonstrate UKHE as a force for good
- **Time for lifelong learning.** Mary Kellett, V.C. at the Open University, reflected in a blog on Wonkhe about the growing interest in lifelong learning and what was needed to make it a reality for more people, including maintenance grants for p/t students and a credit-based qualification system
- **MBA on hold.** The FT reported that Henley Business School was for the first time cancelling its 2019/20 f/t MBA as numbers dipped in the face of rising costs and cheaper, more flexible alternatives
- **Time of anxiety.** The Student Room looked at some of the symptoms of anxiety reported by students including notably the transition from 'results day to freshers' calling for greater use of case studies and peer testimonials to help ease fellow students through the process
- **Free at the point of delivery.** Nick Hillman, director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) argued in a comment piece in The Guardian that opening up higher education for all who might benefit, could in turn see an end to tuition fees, a return to a taxpayer funded system and benefits all round

FE/Skills

- **Spring Statement.** The Chancellor confirmed that apprenticeship reforms announced at the last Budget including halving the co-contribution from SMEs would be rolled out from next month and that the post-18 review would be published shortly
- **Time for Action.** The Learning and Work Institute published a new report on skills development in the UK showing that as other countries continue to raise their skill levels, the UK looks likely to be left behind particularly at low skill levels, calling as a result for a more ambitious approach on improving adult literacy and numeracy by 2030
- **Advanced learner loans.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published its latest prospectus for the 2019/20 funding year with only minor modifications to the previous guidance
- **T level CPD.** The Education and Training Foundation which is leading on developing training support for providers delivering T levels from 2020, invited applications to sit on an Advisory Group helping shape materials and support for the future
- **In the Chair.** Sir Frank McLoughlin highlighted in a comment piece in the TES, how important the steady hand of College Chairs and governors can be, especially given the range of challenges facing the sector
- **Top team.** WorldSkills UK announced who had made it through to represent the UK at the WorldSkills event which takes place in Kazan in August 2019 and will cover skills challenges in specialisms from Aircraft Maintenance to Wall and Floor Tiling

Schools

- **Spring Statement.** The Chancellor made no new announcements about school funding but did promise free sanitary products for schools and colleges in England and some additional money to help police fight knife crime



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- [Safeguarding children from knife crime](#). Ofsted reported on what lessons could be learned from London schools following recent research and focus group activity, arguing that schools let alone exclusions per se, could not be held responsible and calling for improved information-sharing, partnership working and supported early intervention
- [School places](#). The government confirmed the creation of over 3,000 new school places including new special free and alternative provision free schools, following a bidding process launched at the end of last year
- [Teacher wellbeing](#). The Education Secretary announced in an opening address to the Association of Schools and College Leaders Conference, the creation of a new Advisory Group to help promote better wellbeing among teachers
- [Rising tide of pupil poverty](#). The ASCL reported on its survey of pupil poverty in secondary schools in England and Wales noting a significant reported increase in demand for help and support
- [ONE Vision](#). The government set out new plans to help schools in the North East as part of a ONE Vision initiative which will see some 30 schools benefit from additional funding and peer support
- [Ofqual in front of the Committee](#). The Education Committee held its latest 'accountability' session with the Chair and Chief Regulator from Ofqual raising questions on exam provision for disabled students, exam pressures, qualification reforms, iGCSEs and BTECs among other things
- [Can't do maths](#). The Nuffield Foundation reported on its study of maths anxiety, noting that many have it, it increases with age and can be triggered by teachers and parents expressing their own anxieties, calling as a result for greater care and support to be taken particularly for children taking tests
- [The forgotten third](#). FFT Education Datalab reported on the 'forgotten third,' the 30+% of students who didn't achieve a standard pass in GCSE English Language in 2017 who tended to be boys, have special needs and come from disadvantaged backgrounds
- [Ambition Institute](#). Ambition School Leadership and the Institute for Teaching, which announced last year an intention to merge, formally launched as a new joint organisation focusing on marrying theory and practice in teaching and developing and sharing best practice throughout education

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Chancellor's statement in summary – if you lot vote for the #Brexit deal, I'll splash some cash" - [@BBCVickiYoung](#)
- "My two favourite words in the English language are #DegreeApprenticeships. We should rocket boost them to solve our skills deficit and the issue of student loans. No debt, earn while you learn and you're almost guaranteed a skilled job on completion" - [@halfon4harlowMP](#)
- "School leadership shouldn't become a club for the 'charismatic extrovert' - [@tes](#)
- "If I ask my children about the teachers they've loved and respected, for sure there is a correlation to those who set high expectations" - [@AbbyBayford](#)
- "Tim Berners-Lee on 30 years of the web: 'If we dream a little, we can get the web we want' - [@GuardianUS](#)
- "Breathing in before doing something may actually make you better at it" - [@newscientist](#)



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Other stories of the week

- Changing tastes. Many will know that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses a basket of items to measure consumer price inflation (CPI.) Each year, it reviews the basket of everyday items, making changes as need be to reflect current tastes. These offer an intriguing insight into current lifestyles. This year for example, it has removed 10 items that are hardly used anymore including envelopes, HI FIs and washing powder (apparently we all use gel now,) and added 16 more including electric toothbrushes, sugar free cola and baking trays. Full lists can be found in this report from the ONS [here](#)
- Does growth mindset work? In recent years, growth mindset as a tool for learning has become extremely fashionable. It emerged from the work of the psychologist Carol Dweck whose work with groups of children led her to suggest that the 'mind/intelligence' wasn't fixed but could be encouraged to grow and develop. But is this true and does it work as a classroom tool. In a fascinating article, Carl Hendrick, author and teacher, examined growth mindset and what it offers. This sentence sums up his concluding thoughts: "Perhaps growth mindset works best as a philosophy and not an intervention." A link to the article is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "An economy that has defied expectations" – the Chancellor enthuses about the UK economy at the start of his Spring Statement
- "We're coming up to a spending review and I will be making the strongest possible case for school funding in the spending review" – the Education Secretary claims to be on the case about school funding
- "He meets head teachers all the time" – the Skills Minister defends the Education Secretary from claims by the school funding campaign that he had ignored their calls for a meeting
- "The Chancellor's £26bn of fiscal firepower is more than enough to bring austerity to an end in the Spending Review later this year" – Resolution Foundation director Torsten Bell assesses the Chancellor's firepower in the light of the Spring Statement
- "This is not a call for compulsory military service...instead this is a call to look seriously at developing programme of national service that will have the effect of bolstering social cohesion for generations to come" – Chuka Umunna on the case for a new form of Citizenship Service
- "The painful truth is that we have become unloved by Ministers, Whitehall officials, the commentariat and the media" – Sir Anthony Seldon laments what's happening to UKHE
- "Schools simply do not have the ability to counter the deep-seated societal problems behind the rise in knife crime" – Ofsted reported on what it had learned from looking at the issue in schools in London
- "Let's revive Young Apprenticeships, at least as a choice for this age group" – Dominic Raab MP calls for more vocational programmes including Young Apprenticeships for 14-16 year olds in a policy speech on social mobility
- "The UK's qualifications profile has improved over time but its relative position has not –other countries started ahead and many have improved faster" – the Learning and Work Institute reports on the UK skills profile
- "Common service suggests that it is not possible to have both free tuition and unlimited student numbers" – guest blogger Alison Kershaw considers the taxing issue of university tuition fees



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Number(s) of the week

- 0.2%. How much the UK economy grew in the three months to the end of January 2019, disappointing according to commentators although there has been some pick-up in January itself
- 1.2%. The growth forecast for the UK this year, down from 1.6% as predicted in the Autumn Budget but higher than that predicted by the OECD, according to the Chancellor in the Spring Statement
- £200m+. How much the Chancellor allocated for science and technology projects as part of the Spring Statement
- £100m. How much extra money will be made available to help the police tackle knife crime, according to the Chancellor in his Spring Statement
- £1.9bn pa. How much extra money would be needed to raise adult skill levels by 2030, according to a new report from the Learning and Work Institute

What to look out for next week

- Parliamentary approval scheduled for regs on Relationships, Sex and Health Education (Wednesday)
- Westminster Hall debate on SEN support in schools (Wednesday)
- Next EU Council meeting (Thursday, Friday)