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Policy Tracker – Keeping track of what happened in the world of education in August 2016



Main talking points

The main talking point this month has been the exam results season and the traditional rituals that go with it. Attainment and gender gaps along with alternative routes and assessment pressures remain hot topics. Ofqual's monitoring report (listed) provides useful technical coverage. Elsewhere the apprenticeship levy, the graduate premium and the latest dept plan have variously attracted interest over recent weeks.

Key headlines from the month

- New Ministerial portfolios. DfE and BEIS publish each of theirs
- Early years funding. Government consults on new formula
- Free Schools. DfE extends criteria to include social and demand needs
- Grammar schools. Debate breaks out as the government considers options
- Marked exam papers. Pearson to make freely available next year
- Crowdsourced exam questions. OCR considers the case
- EBacc. Education Datalab suggests new GCSE grade threshold could hit some schools hard
- Coding. Sutton Trust announces two new schemes to help widen access
- GCSE results. EBacc entries up, A*-C core pass rate for 16 yr olds slightly down, more so for 17 yr olds
- A' level language results. Pass rate remains steady, AS entries drop, uni entries up
- Apprenticeships. Public Accounts Committee announces new Inquiry
- NEETs. Up for the 16-18 age group, down for 19-24 yr olds in latest figures
- FE. Latest wave of mergers go through
- FE inspections. Ofsted adjusts its guidance to fit the increasing number of college mergers
- HEBrexit. Wonkhe hosts major conference to assess impact
- TEF. Chris Husbands appointed as first chair for the new Teaching Excellence Framework
- Uni fees. Sutton Trust highlights young people's continuing concerns about costs
- Maintenance grants. Replaced by loan system from start of the month as Labour pledges to reverse
- Widening participation. Latest stats show little progress in narrowing HE access gap
- National Student Survey 2016. Little change with 86% of final year undergrads satisfied
- Safeguarding research. Treasury steps in to safeguard current commitments
- Local growth champions. BEIS Ministers adopt roles as local growth champions

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Reports/Publications of the month (in order of publication)

- **Counting the cost of UK poverty.** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation examines the impact across all age groups highlighting an annual cost to schools of some £10bn
- **The Graduate Premium.** The Intergenerational Foundation condemns some of the claims about the value of the graduate premium in a new report
- **Factors associated with predicted and achieved A' level attainment.** UCAS digs into last year's data and finds GCSE results and mix of A' levels as decisive factors
- **2016 School and College performance tables.** The DfE publishes what will count this year when the new accountability arrangements such as Progress 8 will start to take effect
- **School teachers' pay and conditions 2016.** The DfE publishes the latest guidance to accompany the Sept award
- **Where next for apprenticeships?** CIPD invites leading commentators to consider the question in a collection of essays, with a call for a more needs rather than market orientated system
- **Getting apprenticeship reform right for small businesses.** The Federation of Small Businesses publishes a new report arguing that new incentives and support would help
- **England's apprenticeships.** The IPPR think tank assesses the current state of reforms and identifies four areas of concern covering: quality, training, progression and market responsiveness
- **The role of universities in skills ecosystems.** University alliance completes its series looking into HE and regional systems by examining regional skill development with Manchester as a model
- **Technical and applied qualifications for 14-19 year olds.** The DfE publishes the latest guidance for inclusion in the 2019 performance tables
- **Double Jeopardy.** The National Union of Students publishes a second report on how the £9,000 tuition fee students are faring, finding many moving back home as they stress about debt
- **Young people's mental health care.** The Education Policy Institute highlights some of the barriers particularly around workforce recruitment and variable provision in a follow-up report
- **Passports to Progress.** The Social Market Foundation think tank, with support from Pearson publishes a further report highlighting the growth in the number of people entering HE with BTECs
- **Productivity and Lifetime Earnings of Apprentices and Graduates.** Barclays and the Centre for Economics and Business Research report on the narrowing of the wage gap between the two
- **The puzzle of graduate wages.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies reflects on why graduate wage returns have remained constant despite a rise in graduate numbers but suggests things might change
- **School inspection handbook.** Ofsted makes a few small adjustments to Sections 5 and 8 of its inspection handbook for the coming school year
- **DfE departmental plan for 2015-2020.** The newly merged single dept issues an updated corporate young people's plan built around the same three core objectives
- **Summer 2016 GCSE, AS and A' level monitoring.** Ofqual publishes a summary of its monitoring activity and actions for the awarding of this year's summer GCSE and AS and A' exams

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Speeches of the month

- (Deliberately left blank this month)

Quotes of the month

- “I want today’s teachers and schools to excite and instil as much passion for learning as my teachers and schools did for me” – new Secretary of State Justine Greening reflects on the task ahead
- “My dream job” – new Skills Minister Robert Halfon appears equally excited about his new role
- “From now on, universities will, in part, be judged on how you feel you were supported academically as well as the outcomes of the course” – the HE Minister pens an open letter to students on new HE quality arrangements
- “And just like planning a holiday, once one series is over, we start planning the next one” – Ofqual blogs about the exam season cycle
- “Surely this is evidence enough that hitting students over the head with the same form of learning and assessment is not the way forward” – AELP Chief Exec Mark Dawe believes that this year’s GCSE results prove making young people repeat their GCSE English and maths doesn’t always bear fruit
- “Boys emerged as the most responsive to bribes” – Currys PC World surveys parents who offer phones and laptops as incentives to do well in exams
- “My dad got lots of practice books and old papers for me to go through” – a youngster recounts his experience of taking the 11+

Word or phrase of the month

- Wage returns. Rapidly becoming the measure of success for many learning routes but is it the only one?

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