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## Policy Eye



### Highlights of week ending Friday 21 July 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

The end of term has beckoned for many this week with MPs heading off on Thursday and many schools and colleges following suit today (Friday,) weighed down no doubt by the mass of reports, announcements and updates which have poured out as the week has progressed.

Most, but not all, has come from government and most of it has been around three familiar pressure points for education, namely funding, provision and accountability, where the aim has been to shore up where things currently stand prior to the next burst of activity which will come with the Party Conferences in the autumn. Links below but here are some headline messages from those three areas.

Funding first where debate about tuition fees and public sector pay and pensions have rumbled on but where the big news came at the start of the week with the Education Secretary announcing a new settlement for schools ahead of the transition to the national funding formula from 2018/19. The announcement was given 'a cautious welcome' in some quarters but as the Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed out, by the time you've pitched in rising costs, pupil numbers and inflation, it amounts to a real terms cut over time. Three riders stand out. First, this is a 2-yr settlement, future funding will depend on the next spending review. Second, schools will be closely scrutinised over value for money and third, the government has yet to publish its operational guide for councils for the coming year, so the full picture is not quite complete.

Still on funding, unsurprisingly the 16-19 Associations have been quick to point out that their providers have also been starved of cash and need to catch up. Elsewhere the HE Minister made value for money the core theme of his Reform speech this week arguing among other things for better value courses, restraint on pay and consumer- based contracts for students. Funding in other words remains a source of tension.

Second, provision where there've been reports this week on comprehensive universities (brave,) Academies (no panacea yet,) study programmes (all about the planning) and SEN (illuminating) but where the government's response to two long-running projects have been the two main stories. First, on the EBacc, 'an unnecessary straitjacket' according to the NAHT, 'right for the majority of pupils' according to the Minister, the government confirmed it was extending its timescale for take-up. And second the Smith Review on post-16 maths where the government responded to the 18 recommendations by promising additional support and incentives to encourage the quality and take-up of post-16 maths. Nor should we forget the brief delay in moving forward with T-levels.

Third and finally, accountability where this week the government has published arrangements for this year's performance tables and for the pilots for subject level excellence metrics in HE along with a report and an update on Progress 8. Plenty to chew over before MPs trudge back on 5 September.

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## Top headlines this week

- 'GCSE reforms risk losing 'real substance' of education, says Ofsted boss.' ([Monday](#))
- 'This extra £1.3bn isn't nearly enough and won't stop the schools funding campaign.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'It's official: 90% EBacc target pushed back five years.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Johnson attacks excessive pay for university heads.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Private university launches first knowledge-based PGCE.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [School funding](#). The Education Secretary confirmed in a statement to Parliament that additional funding would be put into school budgets over the next two years to increase basic per pupil funding and support the transition to the new national funding formula
- [DfE Annual Report and Accounts](#). The DfE published its annual 200+ page rip through how things went last year to March 2017, with Section 3 offering a useful snapshot of performance outcomes to date
- [Public sector pay pain](#). The TUC calculated how much a decade of pay freezes and caps was having on public sector pay with teacher's pay for example, based on CPI inflation figures, down some £2400 over the period
- [Round 2](#). The second round of Brexit negotiations began with the respective working groups split into four to consider: citizens' rights; the financial settlement; the Northern Ireland border issue; and other technical stuff; with the meeting on the issue of citizen's rights proving to be the longest and the one on the costs of the divorce settlement the most difficult
- [Gainful gigging](#). The Reform think tank added its voice to the growing interest in the gig economy, highlighting the benefits of flexi working that many workers often look for and calling, in a new report, for work programmes and employment services to support more flexi approaches to work
- [Living standards in the UK in 2017](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) launched a new report, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, on living standards in the UK in 2017 showing that while income inequality and levels of absolute poverty may have changed little since the recession, earnings and income growth for many families have suffered
- [When I'm 68](#). The government confirmed that it would bring in the increase in the state pensionable age to 68 for those born between April 1970 and April 1978 earlier than originally scheduled, phasing it in between 2037 and 2039 rather than 2044 to 2046

### HE

- [Latest from the Minister](#). The HE Minister confirmed in a speech to the Reform think tank, that the government was not intending changing the current fee regime but was looking to ensure greater value for money through such measures as 2-yr degrees, changes to the Teaching Excellence Framework, student contracts and monitoring Vice Chancellor's pay
- [TEF spec](#). The DfE set out the two models it will use as it pilots the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) at a subject level over the coming year with potential full implementation from 2019/20



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- **Don't panic.** Money expert Martin Lewis urged graduates not to panic and try and pay off parts of their student loan early, arguing that unless they go straight into a highly paid job for life, most will never repay their debt
- **Take three.** The Acting Director of the Russell Group published a new blog suggesting three ways (modifying the interest rate, the repayment threshold and the repayment system) by which the current fee system could be improved
- **Staying the course.** The Social Market Foundation examined some of the issues around student retention in a new report commissioned by the UPP Foundation, noting that some groups, particularly in London, appeared particularly vulnerable and calling for a new focus on tackling the non-completion rates for black students and disadvantaged students
- **The comp university.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published an Occasional Paper looking at the case for creating comprehensive universities which like comprehensive schools could be more diverse and representative of society as a whole

## FE/Skills

- **T-level delay.** The Skills Minister confirmed that the first pilots of T-levels will be postponed for a year to Sept 2020 to allow for more development work to be carried out, although it still hopes to have most routes available by Sept 2022
- **Don't forget 16-19 yr olds.** Bodies representing providers of 16-19 education wrote to the Education Secretary calling on her to increase the funding rate for 16-19 yr olds who had not been included in the recent funding increase for schools and who remained well behind in funding terms
- **More employer views.** Ofqual reported on its first survey of employer perceptions of vocational qualifications finding a mixed bag with some sectors much more up to speed than others but most at least aware of changes to functional skills and the assessment of apprenticeships
- **16-19 study programmes.** The government published its latest non-statutory guidance for providers on what should go into effective 16-19 study programmes and how best to deliver them
- **Making it work below L2.** The DfE published commissioned research on 'best practice' features of course provision for 16/17 yr olds below L2, highlighting flexibility, vocational relevance and personal support as core ingredients
- **Modernise or Die.** The government followed up its letter last week to the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) by reporting on how it was implementing the recommendations in last year's Farmer (Modernise or Die) report on the industry and calling on the industry to do its bit and undertake a series of its own reforms

## Schools

- **National funding formula.** The Education Secretary confirmed that the government intends to start the transition to the new funding formula in 2018/19 although councils will continue (with guidance from government) to apply local formulae for the next two years
- **EBacc in time.** The government finally issued its response to the consultation on EBacc take-up confirming that it was looking for 75% of pupils Yr 10s in mainstream state schools to be taking EBacc subjects by 2022 and 90% by 2025 although EBacc average point scores across the 5 subject areas would be adopted as a headline performance measure from 2018



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- **Whither the arts?** The government published a brief paper to support its claim that the introduction of the EBacc was not having a negative effect on the take-up of arts subjects in schools
- **Post-16 maths.** Professor Smith's report into post-16 maths was finally published putting forward 18 recommendations to help improve quality and take-up of post-16 maths with the government responding by announcing, among other things, a new £16m L3 Support Programme
- **Performance tables.** The government set out its plans for this year's performance tables showing minimal change to the primary tables, some changes to the secondary tables including the use of standard and strong GCSE passes for GCSE English and maths, and the inclusion of L2 voc quals for 16-19 measures
- **Progress 8.** The government outlined a number of areas of concern that schools had raised in a survey on Progress 8 including worries about its impact on curriculum balance and the distorting effect of poor performance by a small group of pupils, and confirmed that it will continue to make improvements
- **Setting the GCSE scale.** Ofqual reported on some of the deliberations, background thinking and consultation that went into the development of the new GCSE grading arrangements
- **Hit and myths.** Ofsted's National Director Sean Harford reckoned that at least seven out of the nine myths identified, (such as needing to see evidence of individual lesson plans,) had been tackled as part of its myth-busting campaign
- **Pulling together.** The NFER published new research showing that rather than turning to outside providers, the school system has sufficient capacity to provide its own support with the number of high-performing schools in both primary and secondary exceeding the number of weaker schools, albeit with regional differences
- **Academy capacity.** The DfE published the results of its research report into factors affecting academy sponsorship and/or partnership noting that a number of 'push and pull' features often came into play ranging from best fit, to resources, geography, shared ethos and institutional attitudes
- **The problem of sustainability.** The Education Policy Institute with research from the LSE examined how far Academies had, so far, brought long-term improvements to school performance, concluding that well, it varies and a lot depends on sustainability
- **SEN support.** The DfE published its latest commissioned survey of how schools and colleges support pupils with special educational needs, indicating that a range of different practices and resources were being used amid some concerns about consistency but that levels of support generally were good

## Tweets(s) of the week

- "Schools need a dustbin lid sized cake budget not a muffin being re-sliced again. Stuffing the crumbs into one gap is not enough" - [@mm684](#)
- "To reiterate for the billionth time: the EBacc is made up. It's not a qualification. It's just a thing Gove made up for a Marr interview" - [@miss\\_mcinerney](#)
- "\$5bn in US student debt could be wiped off because of lost paperwork" - [@Independent](#)
- "Loving that the 13<sup>th</sup> Dr is a product of the FE sector [@tesfenews](#) [@FEWeek](#)" - [@LindseyWSC](#)
- "Can't decide if our campaign to ditch business speak is blue sky thinking or low hanging fruit. Worth doing either way" - [@josh\\_hardie](#)



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## Other stories of the week

- What do academics read on their summer hols? It's the time of year when book lists for summer reading are published. The Times Higher this week asked a number of leading academics what they'll be reading on their trips to Tuscany and elsewhere. The response was suitably erudite. Sir David Eastwood, Vice Chancellor at Birmingham University will be delving into Fritz Trumpi's 'The Political Orchestra: The Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics during the Third Reich' while incoming chief of the Office for Students, Nicola Dandridge will be leafing through Yanis Varoufakis' 'Adults in the Room; My Battle with Europe's Deep establishment.' The full list is [here](#)

## Quote(s) of the week

- "This is looking like an end of term that's worthy of cautious celebration" – Geoff Barton, Gen Sec of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL,) responds to the latest school funding statement
- "Courses would not be flooded with idiots any more than public libraries are besieged with illiterates" - the New Statesman's Peter Wilby suggests one way out of the tuition fee 'problem' would be to make some university courses free and open to all
- "The way I learned stuff as a Minister was when I went on visits" – new Chair of the Education Committee Rob Halfon is keen to ensure his Committee hears it from the front line
- "That is not something any of us should be happy with" – Ofsted's Chief Inspector raises concerns that the new GCSEs encourage teaching to the test
- "It's hard to see what purpose it serves any more" – ASCL's Geoff Barton queries the government's continued pursuit of the EBacc
- "It's fair to say we won't be winning a popularity contest any time soon" – Ofsted's National Director Sean Harford reflects on the price of fame indicated in the latest survey on Ofsted
- "No intervention will be made on the basis of writing data alone" – the Education Secretary confirms that primary schools won't be judged solely on their SATs writing scores
- "I'm excited but also a bit scared because everyone is going to be a lot bigger than me and the school will be much bigger" – Year 6 pupils offer their thoughts as they come to the end of their time at primary and consider the move to the big school
- "Because of you" – three little words from pupils that would encourage more teachers to stay in the profession according to one correspondent in the TES

## Number(s) of the week

- 2.6%. The latest inflation figures for the UK for the month to June, down unexpectedly 0.3% on the previous month largely due to lower oil prices, according to the Office for National Statistics,
- £2414. The fall in average teachers' pay between 2010 and 2017 based on the CPI measure for inflation, according to a briefing on public sector pay by the TUC
- 14.8m. How many certificates were awarded to learners last year, down 7% on the previous year according to the latest stats from Ofqual



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- 24%. How many uni students were awarded a first-class degree, up 5% on the previous and part of a rising trend according to a survey by the Press Association
- 6.3%. The drop-out rates for young first-time UK students in 2014/15, up 0.6% on the year before, according to a report by the Social Market Foundation
- 45%. How many employers were aware of changes to functional skills and the assessment of apprenticeships according to a new survey of employers by Ofqual
- £4,800. The new minimum per pupil funding level for secondary schools as announced by the Education Secretary
- 2,755. The number of responses received to the EBacc consultation according to the government's official response
- 69%. How many teachers report finding Ofsted inspections 'highly stressful,' with the highest percentage being in primary, according to Ofsted in its latest teachers' survey report

## What to look out for next week

- Summer recess until 5 Sept