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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 7 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

A lot to catch up on this week.

It includes, in no particular order, some important statements from DfE Ministers, interim results for this year's SATs, two important positional speeches from senior Ministers, keynote speeches on skills, a flush of reports covering vulnerable children, school funding, 14 – 19 provision, devolved skills services and preparing for uni, and running throughout the week, growing debate on two hugely important issues, namely public sector pay and university tuition fees. Links below but here are a few headline pointers.

First those statements which came out in response to questions in Parliament. Three stand out. First, that whatever was said in the manifesto, there'll be no change for school meals. Second, the government will respond to the EBacc consultation 'soon' and third, the government is looking to start introducing the school funding formula from 2018/19. The last one perhaps is the most surprising but each offers further evidence of how post-election policies are being re-aligned and in some cases re-engineered.

Second, and on the topic of post-election re-alignment, those two important positional speeches. One was from the First Minister Damian Green, the other from the Chancellor, each offering a wider perspective on the context for government policy. Damian Green highlighted three modernising policies the government now needs to embrace including: housing, technical education, and City Deals. Each matters to education but it was his later comments about looking at tuition fees that grabbed the headlines. The Chancellor's speech two days later was notable for its 'no change here' defence of government economic policy, signalled in a series of metaphors such as 'holding our nerve' and 'no taking feet off pedals.'

Third, and a follow on, those two big economic based issues of public sector pay and university tuition fees. On pay, there's been a growing clamour to lift the 1% Osborne imposed pay cap. Teachers, according to a Manpower Economics [report](#), have seen pay drop by £3 an hour in real terms over the last decade; other professions have fared no better. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an extra 3% on public pay could cost £5bn but the Chancellor appears not for turning, at least not yet given an Autumn Budget awaits.

On tuition fees, the IfS report challenging the impact, effect and costs of the current fee regime, has added bite to a debate already gathering momentum. As the wonkhe commentary indicates, what the report does is to highlight some difficult long-term questions suggesting that as Miranda Green [argued](#) in the FT, a day of reckoning on fees potentially looms.

Finally, SATs, a sword of Damocles for schools perhaps as ASCL put it but where the interim results this year showed that pupils have done them proud with performance across the 3Rs up 8% on last year.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Greening 'demands £1bn' to protect school funding.' (Monday)
- 'SATs: 61% reach expected standard in 3Rs.' (Tuesday)
- 'Student debt rising to more than £50,000, says IfS.' (Wednesday)
- 'Greening announced programme to empower FE leaders.' (Thursday)
- '10-15 Institutes of Technology to be established.' (Friday)

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **Handbrake on.** The Chancellor confirmed in a speech to the CBI that while he recognized the growing calls to ease the brakes on public sector pay, he was not minded to take his foot off the pedal of the government's current economic policy
- **A skills army.** The Education Secretary set out her plans to create 'an army of skilled young people' largely through the development of technical provision and of the FE sector, in a speech to the British Chambers of Commerce
- **Labour plans on skills.** Jeremy Corbyn also spoke at the British Chambers of Commerce Conference where he re-iterated his Party's commitment to a National Education Service incorporating a balanced school curriculum, free FE provision and an end to tuition fees
- **Vulnerable children.** The Children's Commissioner reported on her ongoing work to try and identify and categorize vulnerable children in England where official data and thus targeted support have proved difficult to deliver in the past
- **Names on the door.** The DfE finally confirmed the official responsibilities for the new Ministers at the DfE with, as expected, Anne Milton leading on Apprenticeships and Skills, Robert Goodwill on Children and Families and Nick Gibb with an extended brief
- **Adding a D.** The Dept for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) announced that it was adding 'Digital' to its Dept title as it hosted the first meeting of the new Digital Economy Council where government funding under the new Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund was confirmed

HE

- **Student debt.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) reported on the current issue of HE funding and in particular tuition fees which with increases in interest rates, were leaving graduates facing huge lifetime debts, potentially deterring students in the long run while providing little flexibility over course planning
- **Great expectations.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) and Unite Students published a new report looking at the hopes, expectations and in many cases anxieties felt by many young people as they prepare to go to university, arguing that more should be done to help prepare them for what to expect
- **Tuition fees in limbo?** Wonkhe reported on the current rising debate on university tuition fees arguing that while there was no obvious appetite at the moment for another major review of fees, leaving things in limbo was no answer either



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FE/Skills

- **Preparing for T-Levels.** The Education Secretary used her speech to the British Chambers of Commerce to announce a number of steps to help the FE sector prepare for the introduction of T-Levels including a College Improvement Fund, a programme for National Leaders of FE and an expanded role in raising standards for the FE Commissioner
- **Think local.** The Local Government Association (LGA) set out plans for a devolved system of employment and skills, based on proposals from the Learning and Work Institute, which would see the current maze of employment, skills and apprenticeship activity devolved to local councils as a one-stop service from 2022
- **Work experience.** The Learning and Work Institute along with Fair Train reported back on their call for evidence on what makes for good work placements concluding that better guidance, more funding and strong case study material would be a good start
- **On Edge.** The Edge Foundation published further thinking on 14-19 provision calling for 14 year olds to be able to start apprenticeships, work experience to be compulsory in schools and GCSE to be based on stage rather than age, as part of an eight point plan for a more unified 14-19 system
- **Boldly going.** Joe Dromey from the think tank IPPR outlined four 'bold' steps the government should take on apprenticeships including: re-focusing the 3m target around higher-levels; strengthening the employer voice; extending the levy to include skills and productivity; and beefing up sector systems

Schools

- **SATs scores.** The DfE published the interim KS2 SATs results for this year showing results up on last year, the first year in which the new 'tougher' tests were introduced, with the scaled scores highest for spelling, punctuation and grammar
- **Where next on school funding?** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) argued that the government would need to allocate a further £1.3bn over and above the manifesto promise of £4bn, particularly for schools in lower funded areas but that either way, local authorities needed to know the direction of travel pretty soon
- **Prevent.** A new report was published on the Prevent strategy, based on a series of interviews of educational professionals conducted by Coventry, Durham and Huddersfield universities, showing that while there was support for the principles behind the Prevent strategy, there were concerns about the deployment of British values and the stigmatizing of particular groups
- **Tackling bullying.** The government brought together its guidance and advice for schools on the issue of bullying including where this extends to cyber bullying
- **Digital digest.** The Centre for Education Economics (CfEE) published a series of commentaries on the impact of technology in education concluding that while it's no immediate panacea, used carefully technology can help improve performance and assessment

Tweets(s) of the week

- "I used to wait up for party things like New Years and my birthday...I now wait up for SATs results...just not the same really" - [@Oldprimaryhead1](#)



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- “Isn’t it ridiculous that the state pays off most student loans, say people who want the state to, um, pay all HE costs” - [@jonathansimons](#)
- “3m apprenticeship starts mean diddly squat if they don’t finish. Retention is really important says @OfstedNews at Summer Data Conference” - [@NickLinford](#)
- “We want to make sure that all the parts of the post-16 jigsaw fit together [@JustineGreening](#)” - [@tesfenews](#)
- “Teachers don’t need flashy wellbeing schemes, they just need a humble staffroom” - [@AnnMroz](#)

Other stories of the week

- Thank a Teacher. It’s that time of year when families start to think about what gift to give a teacher at the end of what’s sure to have been an exhausting year. A survey in Mumsnet provides an interesting window into what’s involved. The typical spend for a primary school teacher at least is £10.60, although some spend up to £25. As for what to give, the most popular in order include: chocolates; vouchers; alcohol; homemade gifts; and flowers. Many teachers perhaps will raise a glass at this response: “For my son’s teachers I’m considering gin. If I’d had that class all year I’d be on a gin drip. She deserves a bloody medal.” The Mumsnet survey is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “They have travelled a long way but still the sunlit uplands seem stubbornly to remain one further ridge away” – the Chancellor responds to those questioning continuing austerity
- “Another 3% on public pay could cost something like £5bn” – Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies spells out the options facing the Chancellor on public sector pay
- “A huge issue” – what university tuition fees have become according to First Minister Damian Green
- “My first job was in Morrison’s supermarket” – the Education Secretary on the value of work experience
- “These are not left-wing or right-wing issues. They are national imperatives” – Adam Marshall, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce on the importance of skills, access and opportunities
- “When they made recommendations on school teachers’ pay I think I always accepted” – Michael Gove thinks he always honoured teachers’ pay recommendations
- “The new national funding formula comes in in 2018/19” – according to the Schools Minister in response to a question this week
- “The results of the consultation on implementing the English Bacc and the government’s response will be published in due courses...I hope soon” – according to the Under-Secretary at the DfE in answer to a question in the Lords this week
- “Senior leaders shouldn’t have to spend half their lives in the car driving between lots of schools” – the chair of the National Governance Association expresses concerns about the size of some MATs
- “4 months, 12 experts, 500 pages and 4 spreadsheets later and our answer is: we don’t know” – the Children’s Commissioner on the challenges of trying to find out how many vulnerable children there are in this country
- “This has a dramatic impact on how well they learn new words from stories” – researchers from Sussex University report that children learn better when the number of illustrations per page is restricted



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Number(s) of the week

- £1.3bn. How much the government the government needs to add to the schools budget by 2021/22, on top of the pledged £4bn, according to the Education Policy Institute
- £5.8bn. The funding gap local councils are likely to face by 2020 if current cuts continue, according to the Local Government Association
- £100m. How much the government is putting into the Rutherford Fund to attract highly skilled researchers to the UK, according to the HE and Science Minister, Jo Johnson
- 0.5%. The drop in output per hour in the first quarter of 2017 indicating that UK productivity is falling rather than rising, according to latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 440,300. The number of apprenticeship starts since last Sept, up 14.5% on the previous year, largely at higher level according to the latest statistical returns from the DfE
- £3 an hour. How much average pay has fallen for teachers over the last decade according to a report for the Office of Manpower Economics
- 64%. How many parents take their 'children' to university Open Days according to the Student Room
- £5,800. How much interest the average students accrues on their tuition fee debt while studying according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 61%. How many young people indicated they were anxious ahead of going to university, with 58% saying they had trouble sleeping according to a survey of 2,000 young people by HEPI and Unite Students
- 61%. How many pupils in England reached the expected standard in this year's SATs which included achieving 26 out of 50 in reading and 57 out of 110 in maths, according to interim results published this week
- 670,000. How many children in England are growing up in high risk family situations, according to latest research from the Children's Commissioner
- £60. How much some Authorities are considering fining parents if their children are persistently late for school

What to look out for next week

- Launch of CBI/Pearson 2017 Education and Skills Survey (Monday)
- Launch of new KPMG report on Essentials of Numeracy (Tuesday)
- Sutton Trust Social Mobility Summit (Wednesday)
- Institute for Fiscal Studies Briefing on tax and spending options for government (Wednesday)
- Launch of Social Market Foundation Commission report on Inequality in Education (Thursday)
- Education Policy Institute event on school funding (Thursday)