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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 20 April 2018

(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 mix of stories for this week, many around schools.

The list includes two surveys, one of disadvantaged pupils and one of word gaps, two reports on multi-academy trusts (MATs,) and updates on primary places and qualification perceptions. Beyond that, the week's brought two reports about the internet, two Lords Committee reports, one on artificial intelligence and the other on citizenship, and a busy schedule for the Education Committee. Here's some details.

Disadvantaged pupils, how they fare against their peers in other countries and what lessons we might draw, was the subject of the latest [report](#) off the production line at the Education Policy Institute (EPI.) Not so well it seems when it comes to GCSE maths, slightly better in reading although as the OUP [report](#) on children's vocabulary also out this week showed, there are concerns there as well. Avoid selection and streaming, support high quality teachers and target funding were the three recommendations in the EPI report.

Multi-academy trusts (MATs) continue to attract attention and this week saw two reports come out, both homing in on the issue of growing pains. There is, as the Key [report](#) noted, no 'magic size' for a MAT, anything between 10 to 20 academies is the general view, but there are some golden rules for growth. The [report](#) for the Ambition School Leadership charity listed nine, ranging from governance to back office functions. The bottom line seems to be that there's no standard template and definitely no one size fits all.

It's been an important week for families with children due to start primary school this autumn with decisions on who had got into which school sent out at the start of the week. Last year 90% + managed to get a place in their preferred school and although the full picture has yet to come in, things are expected to be the same this year. The Commons Library service has a useful [summary](#) of how the system works while for a 'consumer' view, [Mumsnet](#) has some revealing case studies.

Ofqual's latest annual [survey](#) of views on qualifications, completed at the end of last year, was also published this week. It shows continuing broad support for the qualifications system, despite the changes, although slightly less so among young people. Elsewhere the [OECD](#) and [Internet Watch Foundation](#) both published reports on internet and social media usage by young people. The education benefits of the internet remain up for debate but some of the data in the latter report is disturbing.

Finally, it's been a busy week for the [Education Committee](#) with sessions on alternative provision and apprenticeships, the publication of a written response from Ofqual following an earlier session and the announcement of new inquiries into SEND and school and college funding. Oh and an interview of the Chair



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Top headlines this week

- 'Ofsted looking at no-notice school inspections again.' ([Monday](#))
- 'DfE Property Company considers onsite housing for teachers.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Student loans interest rate to rise in line with inflation.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Apprenticeship starts show no signs of recovery.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'IfA boss likens reforms to building an aircraft already in flight.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Commonwealth matters](#). The Prime Minister confirmed government commitment to quality education, apprenticeships and a new Cyber Declaration, along with pledges on tackling malaria and keeping the oceans clean, as part of an address to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting
- [AI in the UK](#). The House of Lords published its Committee report on Artificial Intelligence in the UK arguing that it posed a big opportunity for the UK (potentially) but that its development needed to be carefully and ethically managed and a new Code and policy framework created
- [Changing Internet use](#). The OECD reported on its review of internet use by 15 yr olds in OECD countries between 2012 and 2015 finding that it had increased in all countries surveyed and across all social groups with Chile, Costa Rica, Ireland and Italy showing the greatest increase in use and Greece, Hong Kong and Macao the least increase
- [And more on the Internet](#). The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) published its latest annual report highlighting some of its work on setting up Reporting Portals in some of the world's poorest countries but also alarmingly that it had had to remove over 80,000 webpages and posts of child sexual abuse over the last year

HE

- [Preventing hate crime](#). The Office for Students (OfS) announced that eleven universities would receive funding to work as part of a national network to tackle religion-based hate crime aimed at students
- [On reflection](#). Roger Brown, a former HE civil servant, vice-chancellor and commentator, offered his reflections on 30 years in higher education in a comment piece on wonkhe, highlighting the expansion and marketization of the sector over recent years as the most notable features with the likelihood of more marketization and regulation to come, but suggesting that alternative scenarios were possible
- [Meanwhile in France](#). The Times Higher reported on the unrest in French universities following President Macron's proposals for universities to set admissions criteria in place of automatic enrolment for students who pass the school-leavers baccalaureate

FE/Skills

- [Financial help](#). The government published updated guidance on the types of exceptional financial support available for when a college gets into financial difficulties and when intervention might apply



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- **Building blocks.** The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) launched its new 'levy in, skills out' Business Plan for the next three years which will see it reduce staff and sites as it exits direct delivery of training and refocuses on streamlining services and enhancing support
- **AELP on EPA.** The Association of Employment and Learning providers (AELP) followed up the appearance of its chief exec at the Education Committee by publishing its evidence on where there are concerns about the apprenticeship standards and end point assessment (EPA)
- **Gone to market.** Professor Ewart Keep, director of the Centre of Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE) examined some of the issues around the current trend towards marketization in FE ahead of undertaking more detailed work on the topic for the FE Trust for Leadership
- **All in it together.** David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, outlined in the TES, three ways in which college leaders could build greater understanding and respect for the college sector including working together, taking personal responsibility and focusing on strategic communications
- **Set and Go.** The Society for Education and Training (SET,) the professional membership arm of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) launched its new brand identity and twitter profile

Schools

- **School/college funding.** The Education Committee announced a new inquiry into school and college funding and the case for new investment ahead of next year's Spending Review, with an evidence call by the end of May
- **SEND Inquiry.** The Education Committee also announced a new inquiry into special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) which will take in how the latest reforms are working and other challenges faced by learners, families and providers
- **Primary places.** The allocation of places for pupils starting primary school this September were confirmed around the country
- **Applications, allocations and appeals.** The House of Commons Library Service published a briefing paper on how school places are allocated in England for mainstream state schools, outlining as the title suggests, the ins and outs of how the system operates
- **Ready for school.** Teach First published figures, ahead of Primary School Offers Day, showing that in some parts of the country up to 40% of children have yet to reach school readiness in terms of having the right skills and emotional development
- **Educational disadvantage.** The Education Policy Institute examined how disadvantaged students in England fare against their peers in some other countries in maths and reading, finding a disadvantage gap amounting to a whole GCSE grade in maths and three-quarters of a GCSE grade in reading
- **Qualification perceptions.** Ofqual published its latest annual survey of views on A' levels, GCSEs and other qualifications finding little change to previous years with confidence remaining highest in A/As levels, most people aware of changes to GCSE grading and most professionals up to speed with the review of marking, moderation and appeals
- **Ofqual response.** Ofqual followed up its appearance before the Education Committee at the end of last year by issuing a letter to the Committee outlining in more detail its views on a number of matters that had been raised including teachers who work as examiners, marking errors and GCSE grading



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- [Dear Damian](#). Teacher training and development bodies wrote to the Secretary of State suggesting a number of ways that might help ease the teacher recruitment difficulties including waiving tuition fees and improving the application process
- [Explaining the risk](#). Sean Harford, National Director at Ofsted, outlined in a new blog how the new approach to assessing risk in good and outstanding schools using computer modelling is intended to work
- [Demystifying MAT expansion](#). The Key for School Leaders examined some of the issues around multi-academy trust (MAT) expansion and merger noting that there is no magic size on which success depends but there are some sensible 'rules' when considering expansion including for example having a one-year trial marriage
- [Building Trusts](#). The education think tank LKMco listed nine particular challenges that smaller multi-academy trusts (MATs) can face as they seek to grow and expand, in a new report for the charity, Ambition School Leadership
- [Academy conversions](#). The Public Accounts Committee announced that it intends to hold an inquiry next month into the impact and value for money of converting schools into academies following concerns about the growing costs and timescale involved in this
- [Closing the word gap](#). The Oxford University Press (OUP) published the results of its research into the vocabulary levels of primary and secondary youngsters in the UK with 43% of primary teachers and 60% of secondary teachers surveyed expressing concerns about a word gap
- [Citizenship education](#). The House of Lords Committee reported on its lengthy inquiry into civic engagement and citizenship pointing out that when it comes to education, citizenship teaching in schools is in danger of disappearing and calling on the government to undertake a review
- [Gatsby Guide](#). The Gatsby Foundation, which produced the eight benchmarks of good careers guidance that sit within the government's careers strategy, published a handbook of case studies and approaches used by schools in the North East region in piloting the benchmarks

Tweets(s) of the week

- "23% of employers think 1 is the top grade in the new GCSEs" - [@teshelen](#)
- "Parents fed up of consistent testing should consider home schooling says Sir Ken Robinson" - [@tes](#)
- "When we educate girls, the world starts to change" - [@foreignoffice](#)
- "Students don't necessarily want more digital – they just want it used better" - [@Jisc](#)
- "Kids say they 'hate' the strict teacher but deep down they absolutely love them. Kids can see a teacher who gives all to protect boundaries and create a safe and stable environment for them day in and day out" - [@RogersHistory](#)
- "Home landline just rang. I had forgotten we have one. Ignored it until it stopped, obv" - [@JackieLeonard01](#)

Other stories of the week

- Learning to Lead. Last year, the Varkey Foundation launched a fascinating new group of education experts: the Atlantis Group. The Group is made up of ex Ministers of Education from around the world



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who come together to offer their thoughts and advice to help the next generation of education leaders address global challenges in education. Recently the Group published the deliberations from its first meeting looking in particular at leadership, with insights and experiences from those who have been Education Ministers adding to the mix. A link to the report is [here](#)

- Just a click away. It's that time of year when arguments and anxieties about exam revision are at full blast in many households. One of the biggest sources of argument is about the intrusion of social media and whether, for instance, teenagers really can revise thoroughly if they keep clicking over to Snapchat or whatever. A report last year suggested that some teenagers spend up to nine hours a day on social media in some form and many in education let alone parents worry that this can damage their school performance let alone their health. The BBC's education correspondent Sean Coughlan helpfully examined the issue in an article this week. A link to the piece is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "Show Halfon a sacred cow and he wants to slaughter it" - Peter Wilby goes in search of the real Robert Halfon, Education Committee Chair, in an interview in The Guardian
- "Our inquiry has concluded that the UK is in a strong position to be among the world leaders in the development of artificial intelligence in the 21st c" – The Lords Select Committee reports on its inquiry into AI
- "It's a mess to be honest" – the chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) offers his verdict on apprenticeship assessment issues to the Education Committee
- "We need to convert the apprenticeship levy into a lifelong learning levy that employers, the Exchequer and the employee all pay into and that individuals can draw on throughout their life for university and skills training" – former Schools Minister Lord Knight adds his weight to reform of the apprenticeship levy
- "The government has allowed citizenship education in England to degrade to a parlous state" – A Lords Committee condemns the decline of citizenship education in schools
- "Just use it for what you need it for, outsmart it, don't give too many details" – Ruby Wax on how to handle technology

Number(s) of the week

- 12. The number of years of quality education that young people across the globe need to be able to fulfill their potential, as confirmed by Commonwealth Heads this week
- 1.6%. The growth forecast for the UK for 2018 against that of 3.9% for global growth, according to the latest forecasts from IMF's World Economic Outlook
- 2.8%. How much average wages grew in the quarter up to February 2018, meaning that they rose above inflation for the first time in a year, according to the latest official figures
- 6.3%. The interest rate on student loans from this September
- 206,100. The number of reported apprenticeship starts between August 2017 and Jan 2018 compared to 269,600 for the same period the year before according to latest official stats



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- 81% and 72%. How many stakeholders surveyed who felt that A/As levels and GCSEs remained 'trusted qualifications,' according to the latest research from Ofqual
- 34%. How many school leaders surveyed said that the pupil premium was being used to plug their budgets, according to research from the Sutton Trust
- 29. How many hours a week 15 yr olds in OECD countries typically spent on the internet in 2015, an increase of eight hours over the previous three years, according to a report by the OECD
- 2,000+. How many primary schools in England the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Maths (NCETM) is hoping to recruit for its professional development programme in maths mastery from this September
- 95m. How many cups of coffee we drink in the UK each day, and growing, according to the British Coffee Association

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee session on value for money in HE (Tuesday)
- QAA Annual Conference 2018 (Tuesday)
- The Academies Show (Wednesday)
- Launch of Policy Consortium report on 'FE and the Skills System' (Thursday)