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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 24 August 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.

Another big week of exam headlines with the publication of this summer's GCSE results, some further reflections on last week's A' level results and assorted other comments on subject choices, career choices and implications for young people generally.

Those GCSE results first where the [TES](#), [Schools Week](#), [FFT Education Datalab](#), [Ofqual](#) and the [Joint Council](#) among others have again provided lots of excellent analysis and commentary. There's a lot of detail and things are a bit more complicated given the recent exam changes but here's five talking points.

First, some of the questions about top grades have been answered. 732 pupils, more girls than boys, gained a clean sweep of grade 9s while 21.5% of all entries gained a grade 7 or above, up 0.4% on last year. Differentiation at the top end however remains under scrutiny. Second, the EBacc impact is harder to read because of the changes to science; entries in humanities and some languages were up but overall entries stable or slightly down depending on who you read. The EBacc still provokes controversy particularly among defenders of other subjects. Third, English and maths resits for 17+ yr olds, still a worry with pass rates in terms of a grade 4 down, especially in maths. The debate around whether resits work and whether there should be alternatives, dedicated funding and so on seems likely to continue. And fourth and fifth two wider issues that continue to hang over GCSEs: why do we still have exams at age 16 and what's the impact on the wellbeing of young people? Both questions were heavily discussed in the build-up to this year's results, remain topical and with little resolution are unlikely to go away.

Before we leave exams, three other points from the other assorted comments that have peppered the media over the last few weeks. First, it's interesting to note that the [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) is to going to explore why so few girls opt for maths and physics; is it a confidence thing as they suggest or is it something more, it will be interesting to find out. Second, two stories this week highlight how technology is being embraced to tackle exam cheating; technology is now becoming a key tool and not just for the perpetrators as the [FT](#) and [TES](#) stories cited below indicate. And third the question of what constitutes a balanced curriculum for the future has run as a sore throughout the summer and raises potentially profound questions for the future, like who decides and how can we know? These and other questions are unlikely to go away.

Other stories of interest this week include a survey report from [the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#) on employer views on T levels with work experience unsurprisingly one of the big concerns. Also Ofsted's latest [survey](#) of what teachers think about school inspections, where its work on myth busting seems to be making some headway and an interesting [report](#) from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) with some eye catching figures on how much it costs to bring up a child in 2018.



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Top headlines this week

- 'New GCSEs put pupils under more pressure, say school leaders.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Employers a 'barrier' to growing apprenticeships.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Google and Facebook asked to counter exam cheats.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'GCSE results rise despite tougher exams.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Heads union to merge within a decade.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [The cost of a child in 2018](#). The Child Poverty Action Group published its latest report into the costs of bringing up children based on the minimum income standard, reckoning that up the age of 18 excluding rent and childcare costs, it would cost a couple about £75,000 and a single parent over £100,000
- [Superfast broadband](#). The government reported on progress in the rollout of its Superfast Broadband Programme claiming that it has added £690m in gross added value to the economy, that 5m homes and businesses have now been added and that 98% of the country will be covered in the next few years
- [Bring back the EMA](#). Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner pointed to the recent statistics showing a rise in the number of 16 yr old NEETs and called on the government to restore the Education Maintenance Allowance that had been scrapped in 2010
- [Exam cheating](#). The FT reported on the work of Pearson and others in developing more sophisticated technology based tools to combat exam cheating in schools, colleges and universities
- [If there's no deal](#). The government included what would happen to Erasmus+ as part of its first tranche of papers on preparing for any possible no Brexit deal, pointing to its previously announced 'underwrite guarantee' which would see funding for current Erasmus+ programmes remain while future funding was resolved
- [Post Brexit skill shortage areas](#). The Centre for Cities warned that cities such as London, Oxford and Cambridge could suffer from labour and skill shortages if there were to be a no-deal Brexit, and called for extending freedom of movement and for the government to deliver on its promise of devolving adult education funding to ensure local needs are met

HE

- [Filling in the biggest skills gap](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a report highlighting the importance of L4/5 provision to both individuals and the country and proposing a number of measures, including changing the funding rules and encouraging higher ed institutions to offer such programmes, as a way of strengthening things
- [Third party essay writing services](#). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) outlined the work it and others were doing to combat essay writing services and other forms of academic misconduct
- [Reading the small print](#). NUS President Shakira Martin highlighted in a comment piece for Wonkhe some of the tactics being used by universities and agencies to lure students during the clearing process



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- [Pros and Cons of the unconditional offer](#). Michelle Morgan of Bournemouth University delved into some of the arguments for and against the use of unconditional offers following this year's rise in its use

FE/Skills

- [Employers' Views of T levels](#). The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) reported on its employer survey finding limited awareness of the reforms but general support for the principles and in particular for the development of broad, employability rather than specialist skills
- [Apprenticeship rethink](#). The Times followed up last week's figures on apprenticeships by publishing a leading article pinpointing two problems with apprenticeships in particular, namely the levy and the 3m target and calling for a re-think on both
- [Off target](#). FE Week among others reported that the government appeared to be backing away from its commitment to a target of 3m apprenticeship starts by 2020
- [Artificial intelligence: utopia or dystopia?](#) Rose Luckin, a leading expert on artificial intelligence, reflected on different potential scenarios for the development of AI in F and HE stressing the importance of developers and educators working together on shared solutions
- [Time for a Revolution](#). The Chief Exec of the Ufi Charitable Trust called for the 4th Industrial Revolution to be accompanied by a 4th Educational Revolution in which the emphasis would be on a digitally enabled FE sector with digitally competent trainers and tools
- [Barriers to Learning](#). The DfE published its report on barriers to learning for disadvantaged groups, undertaken by the Learning and Work Institute and highlighting the importance of learning that can build confidence, is flexible and can respond to a diversity of needs

Schools

- [This summer's GCSE results](#). The DfE published its official verdict and summary
- [Guide to GCSE results in England 2018](#). Ofqual published its guide to results, standards and grade boundaries for this summer's GCSE results
- [GCSE 2018, trends in entries and grades](#). FFT Education Datalab crunched the details
- [Summer 2018 exams](#). Ofqual reported on its monitoring of the GCSE and GCE exams this summer showing how it went about providing for the maintenance of standards and outcomes
- [Subject trends](#). The BBC examined how far exam and qualification changes like the introduction of the EBacc and the de-coupling of the AS were changing what subjects students were studying, with concerns still evident that creative and skill areas were being squeezed the most
- [Speaking as a parent](#). Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) reflected on the ritual of A' level results day from his perspective as both a parent and a commentator
- [A' level myth buster](#). The Careers and Enterprise Company separated the facts from the myths on matters like A' level choices, grades and destinations "Toigh but fair" – the Education Secretary on the 'new'
- [The view from the staffroom](#). Ofsted published its latest annual survey of teachers' views on Ofsted finding over half agreeing with the need for inspections and an increase in the number who believe their inspection was fair and accurate but over half saying it leads to increased amounts of unnecessary work



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- [Why don't more girls study maths and physics?](#) The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) pointed to a lack of confidence among girls and perceptions about male dominated disciplines as two possible factors as it prepared to launch research into this area
- [STEM graduates](#). Academics from Warwick and Leicester examined the careers of STEM graduates in a new report funded by the Nuffield Foundation, concluding that in reality there was no shortage of such graduates coming through instead many chose not to go on and work in key STEM areas

Tweets(s) of the week

- "I've had the 'teaching in an L-shaped classroom with pillars and 52 students' anxiety dream" - [@sezi](#)
- "Don't worry if Freshers' Week turns out to be a bit rubbish. It's one week of many, you may well be feeling a bit discombobulated, and the stuff you'll remember - and which will change your life - is yet to come" - [@JG_THE](#)
- "Why does the media position degree apprenticeships as shunning university? Degree apprenticeships include going to university alongside work. It's less an alternative to university more a different way to get a degree" - [@MaryCurnockCook](#)
- "Banning phones from schools is probably one of the quickest wins a Head can have in terms of reducing stress for staff & kids. I wouldn't want a govt edict on this - but I cannot for the life of me think of any good reason a school would have for *not* banning them" - [@lehain](#)
- "If teaching standards are used to facilitate dialogue, rather than resolve tension, teachers might feel a bit less helpless on their first day of class" - [@OECEduSkills](#)

Other stories of the week

- [What's wrong with our education system?](#) In a forthright article in last weekend's papers, Lord Baker listed 'ten things wrong with the UK education system.' The ten ranged from an over reliance on exams to creative and technical skills being squeezed out for young people. The charge sheet was familiar and not everybody agreed with all of the conclusions drawn but as a former Education Secretary with a lifelong interest in supporting technical education, his views remain important.
- [Surviving the first day of term](#). It's the time of year when many teachers let alone pupils start to fret about the start of a new term/year. For many it can be a daunting experience. One established teacher and blogger offered the benefits of their experience to anyone entering the classroom or becoming a school leader or headteacher for the first time. A lot of the advice consisted of 'Be proud, smile a lot, don't pretend you know everything' but there's plenty more.

Quote(s) of the week

- "Tough but fair"- the Education Secretary on the 'new' GCSE grading system
- "There is nobody so conservative as a secretary of state for education" – Institute for Fiscal Studies director, Paul Johnson reflects on the education system in the light of this year's exams
- "This is a much harder number to begin to estimate or guesstimate" – Andy Haldane, chief economist of the Bank of England considers the impact of artificial intelligence on jobs



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- “There’s a fine line between making your comments accessible or friendly to students and coming across like an embarrassing uncle at a wedding” – NUS President Shakira Martin on ‘marketing’ to uni students
- “Few things are as clear in education policy as the need to reverse the decline in Level 4 and 5 provision” – HE Policy Institute director Nick Hillman on the need to beef up the L4/5 route
- “That target is a pipedream” – the Times leader comment on the government’s 3m apprenticeship target
- “The idea that there are academic and vocational routes and that students need to choose between the two at 18 is as hopelessly out of date as the government’s approach to education and skills” – former Million+ chief exec Pam Tatlow writes about the academic-vocational divide in a letter to The Guardian
- “A policy which rightly sets out to help every young person achieve has a success rate of about 70%. In my book, on such a fundamental set of skills, that is simply not good enough” - AoC chief Exec David Hughes on the GCSE English and maths resit issue
- “Love is like central heating. You turn it on before guest arrive and pretend it’s like this all the time” – one of the top ten jokes selected at this year’s Edinburgh Festival

Number(s) of the week

- £150,000+. The overall cost of bringing up a child including rent and childcare, according to the latest figures from the Child Poverty Action Group
- 800,000. How many people are on zero-hours contracts, according to figures from the Resolution Foundation
- 37%. How many firms feel confident about their and the country’s economic future, down 9% on the previous month, according to the latest confidence survey from the Institute of Directors
- 43%. The number of colleges surveyed who plan to offer more apprenticeships in the coming year, according to a survey by the TES and AoC
- 40%. How many employers surveyed said they’d heard of T levels, according to new research from the CIPD
- 52%. The number of people surveyed who thought A’ level grades were ‘somewhat important’ for their future careers compared to 19% who said not very important, according to a poll by YouGov
- 90%. How many school and college leaders in a survey in England reckoned that the ‘new’ GCSEs caused more stress and anxiety than the ‘old’ ones, according to the ASCL
- 23. How many GCSEs reported on the reformed 9-1 grading scale this year
- 21.5%. How many subject entries (for 16 yr olds in England, Wales and N. Ireland) were awarded a grade 7/A or above this summer, up 0.4% on last year according to official figures

What to look out for next week

- Parliament returns (Sept 4)