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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 20 July 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.

There's an end of term feel to things at the moment.

Many schools, colleges, universities have already finished, more have been finishing this week. As for MPs, they head off as planned next Tuesday rather than dashing for it this week as the government had considered, although not before the traditional end of session rash of reports. Overall, as Chris Husbands, Sheffield Hallam VC blogged, 'it is a time of year when one tide goes out as another prepares to come in.'

One thing school teachers have been hoping to see coming in on the tide this week was an announcement about this year's pay review. The Review Board submitted its proposals to the government a couple of months ago and the professional associations have jointly [written](#) to the Education Secretary urging him to declare on their proposed 5% pay increase. But so far no sound. The nearest we have got was a response by the Schools Standards Minister to a question in Parliament this week, repeating that: "The Department will publish the report and the response as soon as possible." Issues with the Treasury appear to be the sticking point but it leaves very little time for governing bodies to apportion awards.

Issues with the Treasury may become a theme as education, like many sectors, looks to make a strong case for a substantial increase in investment as part of next year's Spending Review. This may be tricky given another report which drifted in this week. This was the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR) latest [report](#) on the state of UK public finances. The report, which also included a blunt working paper on student loans, made for fairly bleak reading. It's worth reading the [presentation notes](#) that accompany the report which point to five conclusions: public finances are coming under increased pressure; many industrialised countries are in the same boat; the outlook has deteriorated since last year; difficult choices need to be made; and further tough action may be necessary. It sounds like expectations being lowered.

One of the most significant developments of the week has been the announcement from the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB,) the body that represents awarding organisations that it intends to call for a judicial review of the implementation of T levels. The [Federation letter](#) says the action is regrettable but that the government isn't listening 'to a chorus of concerns.' That chorus, which includes a rushed implementation schedule and exclusive licensing system has been brewing for some time and especially since the Education Secretary rejected recent advice from his Dept to slow things down. There'll be some important conversations to be had over the coming weeks.

Finally, that end of term rash of government reports. So far they've included relationship education, school exclusions, academy transfers, FE choices; West Midland Skills Agreement; and they're still coming.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Colleges could face autumn strikes over pay.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Universities outsource mental health services despite soaring demand.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Exam boards seek judicial review over T levels.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Australia overtaking UK for overseas students.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Student loan repayment income undervalued by £600m.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Public finances picture](#). The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) published its latest 'Fiscal Sustainability' report into how UK public finances are looking for the medium and short term concluding that things remain pretty tight
- [Knife crime](#). The Home Office reported on its recent work with the PSHE Association, where it has been helping teachers outline the dangers to young people of carrying a knife, especially as the summer holidays beckons
- [More on the robots are coming](#). The consultancy firm PwC examined the impact of new technologies and AI on jobs in the future in its latest report on the Economic Outlook for the UK, suggesting that the net effect was likely to be neutral with as many jobs created as lost, although not all in the same sector

HE

- [Fiscal Illusion](#). The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) reported on the accounting system for student loans pointing out that it represents a fiscal illusion and suggesting instead a number of different ways in which the fiscal implications of such loans could be more appropriately represented
- [The sale of student loans](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) reported on the government's sale of its first batch of student loans concluding that while it was carried out efficiently, different perceptions within government about value for money have left questions about their long-term returns
- [Free speech policies](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) issued a practical guide and set of recommendations to help universities develop codes of practice for freedom of speech on campus
- [New kids](#). The Office for Students (OfS) confirmed that 42 providers, including 18 new ones, had now met the formal criteria to be listed on the OfS register as an 'approved' higher education provider
- [How much? Which?](#) University launched a new student budget calculator that aims to help students with their budgeting by calculating the costs of such items as food, accommodation and going out at their chosen university
- [California dreaming](#). Sir Michael Barber, chair of the Office for Students, urged UK universities to adopt the California University approach of encouraging diversity by actively going out to mosques, youth centres and encouraging more people from diverse backgrounds to apply
- [Six of the best](#). Diana Beech, Director of Policy at the HE Policy Institute, listed six unanswered questions on HE that need tackling as she prepares to take up the role of Policy Adviser to the HE Minister



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FE/Skills

- **T level review.** The Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) launched the first step in what could amount to a judicial review of the implementation of T levels, with a formal letter to the DfE and Institute for Apprenticeships, citing concerns over such matters as timescale and procurement
- **Made in the West Midlands.** The government announced a new co-funded Skills Deal with the West Midlands Combined Authority which will see a new Local Digital Skills Partnership along with improved careers advice, Edtech and apprenticeship and skills opportunities all hopefully developed
- **What does the research tell us?** The Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER) looked at what recent research on apprenticeships in England might tell us, concluding that the definition of an apprenticeship and the balance between quantity and quality remain determining factors
- **Traineeship Barriers.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) followed up its earlier work on Traineeships suggesting that there is still a long way to go and pointing to actions listed in four areas
- **Restructuring bids.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) issued further guidance for colleges intending to bid for funds to support structural changes in the wake of an area wide review
- **Merger manoeuvres.** FE Week reported on which FE sector mergers were due to take place in the next few weeks and how many more were in the pipeline

Schools

- **School funding.** The School Standards Minister issued a statement spelling out the government's line on school funding following earlier debate
- **Healthy relationships.** The DfE launched consultation on draft regulations and guidance on relationship and health education in schools intended to take effect from 2019 and formally from 2020
- **Career guidance for primary school children.** The House of Lords considered the case for developing skills and career advice for children in primary school with the government confirming that a pilot of the Gatsby career benchmarks will be extended to primary schools from early next year
- **Inspection handbook.** Ofsted published its latest handbook for inspectors for the coming year along with an updated list of myth busters for schools to be aware of
- **Checking in.** Ofsted published its latest annual report and accounts showing it had met or exceeded requirements in nine of its thirteen strategic work streams and had completed most inspection schedules despite a reduction in budget
- **Healthy eating.** Ofsted published the results of its review into what primary schools are doing to help reduce childhood obesity arguing, controversially to some, that while it's important that schools do their bit, many of the issues lie outside their control
- **Checking the numbers.** The DfE issued a brief consultation on early-career 'bursary' payment arrangements for maths teachers currently completing their initial teacher training
- **Private tuition.** The Sutton Trust published the results of a new survey on the use of private tuition in England and Wales pointing to a considerable increase in recent years which given the costs, prompted the Trust to call for a voucher system to help lower income families



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- [Disadvantaged and under-represented](#). The Sutton Trust reported on the problems facing many able but disadvantaged pupils who often get left behind and miss out on opportunities presented to their better off peers
- [Resource management](#). The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) invited tenders to support a system of Resource Manager Advisers (RMAs) for schools following a successful pilot of using such RMAs to help schools manage resources more efficiently

Tweets(s) of the week

- “Skills Minister @AnneMilton leaves MPs ‘staggered’ by admitting she wouldn’t encourage her children to study the very first T levels” - [@FEWeek](#)
- “My daughter’s class work books have come home. It makes for fascinating reading. One note says she should keep trying to use ‘casual connectives.’ She’s EIGHT” - [@the AliceRoberts](#)
- “Ave atque vale, humanities - Oxford business school to teach algorithmic trading” - [louiseflucas](#)
- “Children under 13 should not be using Facebook and moderators should be closing down and not turning a blind eye to under-age accounts” - [@ChildrensComm](#)
- “It’s almost a year since we introduced pens to all children from Reception upwards. I almost forgot that they used to write in pencil but it appears to have been a really positive move. I’d definitely recommend it to others who are considering doing the same” - [@MattCurtis76](#)
- “School cancels Punch and Judy show over fears it glorifies domestic violence” - [@SkyNews](#)

Other stories of the week

- [What happens after exams finish?](#) For those that might have missed this last week, Ofqual has published a useful blog looking about what happens once the exams are over. It includes updates about examiners, marking and some key dates.
- [Inspection myths](#). This week Ofsted published its latest handbook for inspection of schools in England. Included as part of this was further useful work on destroying various myths about inspection. The TES has provided a useful summary of this latest list.
- [More on the robots are coming](#). This week the consultancy firm PwC published its latest bulletin on the UK economy with a special chapter dedicated to assessing the impact of new technology and artificial intelligence on jobs. It’s another useful contribution to a growing debate and suggests, for example, that education, along with health and professional, scientific and technical services, will be one of the sectors that could benefit from changes in technology with an increase in the number of jobs.

Quote(s) of the week

- “The government is now looking at how that levy is operating to ensure that we can do what I want to do”- The PM’s rather enigmatic response to a question on the apprenticeship levy at this week’s PM’s Questions
- “Universities that don’t meet their obligations to students should worry as much about our bite as our bark” – Office for Students Chair, Sir Michael Barber issues a warning to universities over grade inflation



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- “We also intend to undertake a review of qualifications at Level 3 and below so that those we fund serve a genuine and useful purpose” – the Skills Minister confirms further qualification review in a written question in Parliament on technical education
- “The CBI will continue to work with the government and support T level pilots in 2020 to help get this important reform working well” – the CBI responds to concerns about T levels
- “I support any head teacher who imposes one” – the Education Secretary outlines his views on banning mobile phones in school
- “We must also recognise that schools cannot provide a silver bullet for all societal ills” – the Chief inspector reminds people that schools cannot be responsible for everything in life
- “We hope that the delay in the announcement means the government is using the extra time productively” – the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) eagerly awaits the impending announcement on teachers’ pay
- “They seem to place significant value on responsibility and maturity, particularly when it comes to alcohol consumption and sex” – The British Pregnancy Advisory Service responds to data in its latest survey showing a fall in teenage pregnancies and in teenagers drinking

Number(s) of the week

- 2.7%. How much average weekly wages, excluding bonuses, rose between March and May this year, slightly down on the previous quarter, according to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 282,000. The net migration figure for the UK last year according to latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 5m. How many young people logged on the Student Room website for help with their studies during this year’s exam period, according to figures from the Student Room
- 90%. How many learners gave their learning provider a score of at least 6 out of 10, according to the latest FE Choices Learner Satisfaction Survey
- 40. The number of permanent exclusions from school per day in 2016/17, up 5% on the previous year, according to figures from the DfE
- 52%. How many disadvantaged students on average gain 5 A/A* grades at GCSE compared to 72% of their better off peers, according to research from the Sutton Trust
- £24 per hour. Average costs of private tuition rising to £27 an hour in London according to figures from the Sutton Trust
- £133.34. Average costs of full-time holiday care for one child per week, according to a survey by the Family and Childcare Trust
- 3 hours, 22minutes. How much time is spent on average watching broadcast TV each day, mainly by older people as the young turn to streamed and subscription channels, according to the latest report from Ofcom

What to look out for next week

- Parliamentary summer break begins (Tuesday)

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