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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 22 June 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.

The big reveal this week was not that the PM had drawn Peru in the World Cup sweepstake but that there's been a notable increase in the number of university students receiving top degrees and, when it comes to school performance, there's little to choose between state and academy chain schools. Neither reveal, outlined in new reports, will come as a big surprise to those in the know but reflect the continuing debate about performance in the education system and how far this is driven by other factors.

All in all, there's been a lot to catch up on this week. On a broader front, the Commons Public Accounts Committee published important reports on PFI and STEM developments, the Education Committee held a witness session on school and college funding, the Chancellor made a keynote speech on the economy and the Home Office published a paper on EU citizen's rights. Social media and its impact on children has also been a hot topic again this week with both the Secretary of State and Ofsted Chief Inspectors, past and present, supporting schools who take a firm line on mobile phone use during the school day.

More specifically this week, the Festival for Education has been in full swing at Wellington College, there's been another rash of reports for HE, the Skills Minister has been out praising FE and announcing two new training schemes, one for industry professionals to train as FE lecturers and one to support construction skills, while there've been a number of interesting reports published for schools, including on missing pupils, computing take-up and maths teaching supply.

And to round things off, as this summer's exam season draws to a close, the mainstream media is beginning to move in with its own thoughts ahead of results days in August. [This](#), from the Daily Telegraph at the start of the week, is what to expect.

A lot of developments therefore so here are a few pointers.

For higher education, post-qualification admissions has [reared its head again](#) with views still as divided apparently as they were 16 years ago when the original Schwartz proposals were proposed suggesting little immediate change this time. The Reform [paper](#) on degree inflation has attracted considerable interest but for those who value an alternative view, it's worth reading Jim Dickinson's [response](#) on the wonkhe website.

For FE, there'll be some disappointment that college funding didn't get much of a look in at the recent Education Committee [session](#) but on a more positive note, it's interesting to see that the DfE and ESFA apprenticeship and tech reform teams are being [brought together](#). And for schools, apart from the EPI report, the [analysis](#) from FFT Education Datalab on 'missing' pupils is an important read.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Computing exam changes are a turn - off.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Ditch predicted grades from university admissions.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'DfE launches £%M fund to attract FE teachers.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Too many firsts risks universities' credibility, says think tank.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'T Levels exam board plans fundamentally flawed.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Keeping children safe](#). Digital and Culture Secretary of State Matt Hancock argued that schools that wish to ban mobile phone use by pupils during the school day should be supported in an address to the NSPCC Conference
- [Disrupted Childhood](#). 5Rights, the charity that helps with children's rights online, published a new report highlighting ways in which some online companies use techniques such as persuasive design to grab children's attention, often leading to damaging side effects on children
- [PAC on PFI](#). The Public Accounts Committee criticized the lack of monitoring and assessment of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes which have been used over the last 25 years to finance infrastructure projects in schools, hospitals and elsewhere
- [STEM issues](#). The Public Accounts Committee highlighted some of the current issues around STEM skills in a new report citing in particular patchy careers advice in schools, gender imbalances, a lack of clarity on the potential role of Institutes of Technology and calling on the government to identify what STEM skills will be needed in the future
- [Innovative nation](#). The Business Secretary outlined some of the funding being made available to British businesses and universities to help support UK science and innovation over coming years, with the aim of making the UK a leading innovative economy by 2030

HE

- [Grade inflation](#). The Reform think tank pointed to a recent exponential increase in the number of top degrees being awarded, suggesting that this was down to such factors as faulty algorithms, institutional pressure and weak quality control, calling instead for a system of national assessments to help determine degree level awards
- [Pay and rations](#). The Office for Students (OfS) issued its 'directions' for higher ed institutions to submit details of VC's pay packages by December this year, with that of other senior staff likely to follow in subsequent years
- [Post Qualification Admissions](#). The University and College Union (Union) revived the perennial issue of whether students should be able to apply to uni before or after their grades are known, arguing that the UK's current approach of applying on the basis of predicted grades suffers from inaccurate predictions and is out of step with best continental practice



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- **Money worries.** Universities UK and THE National Education Opportunities Network reported on their survey of student views on fees and loans finding most focused on initial living costs and future returns but confused about how the financing works and where to go for advice
- **How do students see fee reform?** The Student Room published the results of its survey of over 1,000 students aged 17-24 concluding that for many the big concerns were about transparency, value for money and future employability rather than fee levels per se
- **Passage from India.** The Indian press and student bodies in the UK expressed disquiet that India had been left off the latest list of countries to benefit from simplified student visa requirements announced by the Home Office last week
- **There's an app for that.** The HE Minister Sam Gyimah announced plans to launch a competition next month to create an app that will help prospective uni students cut through masses of data, surveys and rankings to identify best places to study

FE/Skills

- **Moving seats.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) confirmed that the DfE apprenticeship and tech education reform teams will move into the ESFA to work together from this September
- **LEP Chairs.** Number 10 hosted the first Prime Ministerial meeting with Local Enterprise Partnership Chairs where the LEP review was still on the table
- **Apprenticeship funding rules.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) invited comment on its funding rules for the coming year August 2018 – July 2019 which incorporate a few changes such as the introduction of the new care - leaver bursary, following recent announcements
- **Taking Teaching Further.** The Skills Minister launched a new £5m scheme to help train up industry professionals, particularly in sectors like engineering and computing in the first instance, to teach in FE supporting programmes like T Levels
- **Another brick in the wall.** The government launched a new £22m Construction Skills Fund intended to provide on-site training hubs and new entry pathways to help ease the sector's skill shortage
- **The importance of Level 2.** The AELP urged the government to prioritize Level 2 skills provision and funding given its long-term importance to the economy and to individuals

Schools

- **Inspection update.** Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, outlined what progress Ofsted was making in developing a new inspection framework in a wide ranging speech at the Festival of Education, confirming that the current grading system will remain for the present but that Ofsted was keen to tackle a number of current issues including identifying best curriculum practice, pupil behaviour and schools operating in disadvantaged areas
- **School performance.** The Education Policy Institute examined school performance in both academy chains and LAs, finding little difference between the two systems in terms of performance, and arguing that the government should instead focus more on under-performing schools than school type
- **Who's Left?** FFT Education Datalab published the latest in its series of analyses examining the increasing number of school pupils who 'disappear' from school rolls, raising particular concerns about the 6,000 - 7,700 who 'disappear before exams are taken



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- [Computing education ups and downs](#). The latest Roehampton Annual Computing Education Report painted a mixed picture with more schools offering computer science but uptake remaining sluggish and in danger of becoming a niche subject in some schools
- [Struggling with the maths](#). The Nuffield Foundation reported on data supplied by FFT Education Datalab showing that shortages of maths teachers meant some schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas, were struggling to cover classes with properly qualified maths teachers
- [Keeping things in perspective](#). Education commentator Tom Sherrington argued in a new blog that despite a number of issues such as the strains and stresses they generate and the continuing concerns over grading and accountability, it's important to keep GCSE exams in perspective
- [Helping hands](#). The In Kind Direct charity published the results of its recent survey on hygiene poverty, showing just how far some primary teachers were going to help provide children in poverty with basics such as soap and cleaning products
- [Flipgrid](#). Microsoft continued its drive into the education market with an announcement that it had acquired Flipgrid, the video discussion platform used, according to the press release, in 180 countries

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Who says @Lovelsland is not intellectual? New entrant @zaramcdermott is a DfE @educationgovuk Policy Adviser?" - [@halfon4harlowMP](#)
- "By the age of 15, the average student will have spent more than 7,500 hours in school buildings" - [@OECEduSkills](#)
- "Carnegie medal winner slams children's book publishers for 'accessible' prose" - [@GuardianBooks](#)
- "It was on this day in 1984 (June 20) when government announced plans to replace O levels and CSE in 1987 with the new GCSE exams. Still with us 31 years later" - [@TomBewick](#)
- "Bakewell tart lost in space as school loses track of pudding sent into stratosphere" - [@Telegraph](#)

Other stories of the week

- The tools of persuasion. The report this week by the charity 5Rights on what it called 'tech's exploitative relationship' with children had an interesting explainer of the dark arts of 'persuasive design' which draw children into digital use and keep them hooked. Examples include: 'the rush,' which includes using such features as 'likes' and 'hearts' that fuel anticipation and keep users online awaiting a response. Also 'the popularity contest,' that creates a competitive approach to counts of followers or retweets. These and other examples can be found in their press release [here](#)
- Sign him up. Many people may well have seen the clip this week of Emmanuel Macron, the French President, dealing firmly with a young person in the crowd who he felt had shown him little respect on a recent walkabout. In a word, the President told the boy to gain a qualification, earn enough to put food on the table and show more respect. This suggests that if things change, he (the President) could yet make a decent teacher for one of those hard to cover Friday afternoon classes. A link to the story is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

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- “The OfS will address issues of senior staff pay beyond that of the head of provider in 2019” – the Office for Students makes its intentions known on senior staff pay in universities
- “For too long, student finance has been a battered political punch bag”- moneysaving expert Martin Lewis offers his views as to why uni students are confused about student financing
- “My tips for other students would be to learn how to cook a few meals before you go” – current uni students offer tips on The Guardian website to this year’s intake on how to survive life in university halls
- “Its main conclusion is unlikely to end debates about which school structures works best as it finds little overall difference in the performance of academies and maintained schools” – The TES reports on the latest report on school system performance from the Education Policy Institute
- “There is nothing kind about letting a few pupils spoil school for everyone else” – Ofsted Chief inspector Amanda Spielman on the importance of tough love
- “My grandson starts Reception in September and his Mum has been told they’re not allowed to put names on school bags due to GDPR. Is this normal?” – the TES website shares concerns about how General Data Protection Rules are being applied
- “Social media is not designed for under 13s” – the Digi Secretary makes his views known

Number(s) of the week

- 1.3%. The GDP growth forecast for the UK economy for 2018, slightly down from a previous 1.4% forecast, according to the latest figures from the British Chambers of Commerce
- 26%. The proportion of First degrees awarded last year, according to a new report from the think tank Reform
- 54%. How many people surveyed, including current and prospective students, support the idea that university students should make some contribution to the cost of their education, according to the latest survey by Universities UK and NEON
- 42%. The number of people in the school population who haven’t achieved a full Level 2 at age 16, according to the AELP
- 22,000. The number of school pupils who ‘disappear’ from school records sometime between Years 7 and 11, according to research from FFT Education Datalab
- 18. How many minutes a day a teacher could save by using high-quality textbooks rather than having to create their own worksheets, according to evidence quoted at last week’s International Textbook Summit
- 95%. The number of schools that have rules about mobile phone use, according to the DfE
- 2527. How many school mentions can be found on the Amazon UK wish list according to the Huffington Post

What to look out for next week

- Education Questions in Parliament (Monday)
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) National Conference. (Monday/Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session with the Education Secretary. (Wednesday)

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- Maths Education Innovation (MEI) Conference. (Thursday – Saturday)
- European Council Summit considers Brexit progress (Thursday, Friday)