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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 29 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.

Among the policy notices this week was one reminding parents what financial support was available for childcare over the school holidays. A further sign perhaps that the summer term is slowly drawing to a close and the summer break, for many at least, isn't far away. But there's plenty happening between now and then as this week demonstrates.

Much of the attention this week has been on skills training in various forms with the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) hosting their National Conference in sunny London at the start of the week and the OECD hosting its Skills Summit in equally sunny Portugal at the end of the week.

Other notable developments this week have included the latest report on the take-up of languages in English schools, more [concerns](#) about pupil 'off rolling' (being taken off roll ahead of exams or inspections,) an [update](#) from the Edge Foundation on its Big Vocational Debate, the [launch](#) of a competition to create a new app for prospective uni students and more profoundly, some preliminary statistics on student suicides.

But back to the big theme this week on skills and all that goes with it. In a week, as the Minister admitted, of more talk than new announcements, the main news has been the further flexing up of the 10% levy funds, a proposed new Code of Governance for independent training providers, and the promise of assessor training and further support projects to help support the new apprenticeship standards. As some of the stats presented to the AELP Conference indicated, there are still concerns about the levy, employer engagement and quality provision but 3m target or not, the government appears keen to stick with its reforms. FE Week has a helpful summary of the [AELP Conference](#).

Talking of sticking with reform schedules, the timetable for the introduction of T Levels cropped up again this week at two Parliamentary Committee hearings. At the start of the week, the permanent secretary at the DfE told the Public Accounts Committee that like Baldrick they had a plan to ensure introduction went smoothly while later in the week, the Education Secretary told the Education Committee that things were proceeding at what he called 'a good pace.' It will be interesting to see what comes out of the data survey on the readiness of T Level providers which completes next week.

Finally, some sobering statistics published this week. 95 university students in England and Wales committed suicide in the 12 months up to last July. The figures come from [the ONS](#) and while lower than those of a similar age group in the wider population, they represent an increase on recent years. The HE Minister has been [addressing](#) some of the wider issues around student mental health this week.



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Top headlines this week

- 'University student suicide rates revealed.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Greater flexibility added to apprenticeship levy.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Spanish exam entries on track to surpass French in English schools.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Teacher numbers at lowest since 2013.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Cable calls for overhaul of 'nightmare' levy.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Childhood obesity](#). The government announced a range of new measures including the banning of harmful energy drinks, restrictions on advertising and more walking and biking to school, as part of its campaign to halve childhood obesity by 2030
- [Artificial Intelligence champions](#). Digital and Culture Secretary Matt Hancock made a number of announcements about who will lead AI developments for the government with Dame Wendy Hall confirmed as the Skills Champion for AI and Tabitha Goldstaub, a leading AI expert, as the AI Business Champion
- [Not all equal](#). Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) published a fascinating summary of some of the more surprising findings from the Institute's recent report into Living Standards

HE

- [Student mental health](#). The HE Minister, Sam Gyimah, announced a range of measures to help provide greater support with student mental health including the development of a new Charter and the creation of Dept based working group to help students particularly during their first year
- [Student suicides](#). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published provisional data on student suicides in HE in England and Wales for the year up to July 2017, showing a gradual increase over the last decade with young male students appearing the most vulnerable
- [App for that](#). Sam Gyimah, the HE Minister, launched the competition for tech companies to come up with a digital tool that will bring together such features as possible future income returns and employment opportunities for students contemplating which university to choose
- [Data management](#). The HE Data Landscape Steering Group, set up to help streamline data use and flows across the HE sector, reported on progress so far including the creation of a code of practice
- [Fee compensation](#). Cambridge University confirmed that it was not planning to refund any students who may have missed out on any teaching as a result of staff industrial action earlier in the year but that it would consider specific cases where necessary



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FE/Skills

- **Flexing the levy.** The Skills Minister confirmed that from next month, large employers will be able to transfer up to 10% of their levy funds not just to one employer as currently but more widely
- **Good Governance.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) launched consultation on a new code for Good Governance for independent training providers, based around the Nolan Principles and supported by the FE Trust for Leadership (FETL)
- **How to Guide.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency issued a guide to assessment procedures for apprentices in England covering such features as who does what and how to find an end-point assessor
- **Apprenticeship projects.** The Education and Training Foundation listed ten projects it was commissioning around improved teaching, learning and assessment of the new apprenticeship standards that will ultimately be drawn together into a Practitioner Toolkit
- **Improvement Fund.** The government invited bids (by 27 July) for a further round of funding under the Strategic College Improvement Fund
- **More questions.** The Edge Foundation summarized the thinking coming out of its big debate on vocational education so far, issuing a further set of questions that need to be considered in a second phase of discussion
- **Commissioner reports.** The FE Commissioner was interviewed for FE Week where he reported on a busy first half of the year with the number of college mergers and diagnostic assessments both continuing to increase
- **Staff survey.** The National Education Union (NEU) published the results of its survey of FE staff showing many respondents concerned among other things about increased workloads and contemplating whether to leave
- **New Dimension.** The Dimensions Training Solution (DTS,) part of the Stonebridge College Group, announced a last minute takeover of Learndirect
- **HE in FE.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) launched a new framework intended to help enhance 'scholarly' activity of HE provision in FE that could help meet Teaching Excellence Framework demands

Schools

- **Behind the screen.** The Standards and Testing Agency published the pass mark, pupil materials and answer sheet for this year's phonics screening check with the results due to be published in October
- **Language Trends.** The British Council published its regular annual survey of trends in language teaching in English schools showing uptake of French and German still declining but Spanish increasing, and concerns growing about a gulf emerging between the haves and have-nots in languages
- **In a nutshell.** The DfE published its latest 'picture' of schools covering everything from pupil numbers, to class sizes, to ethnic groups as of January 2018
- **GCSE debate.** Shaun Fenton, Chair Elect of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference HMC, offered his thoughts on iGCSEs and GCSEs in a blog on the HMC website
- **Lost children.** The Times added its voice to the growing concerns about pupils being taken off roll and/or managed out of the system particularly when exams or inspections loom, noting that many such pupils were already disadvantaged and that such practices were only likely to add to such disadvantage



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- **Bridging the Gap.** Adoption UK published new research highlighting what it called ‘four gaps’ facing adopted children, including an attainment gap, resources gap, empathy gap and understanding gap
- **Let Them Teach.** The Times Ed, along with leaders of the main unions, wrote to the Home and Education Secretaries calling on them to help ease teacher recruitment problems by extending tier 2 skilled worker visas to teachers of all subjects not just some
- **Wood and trees.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published a guide for school governors and trustees on what data they should expect to see when considering how well a school is doing
- **Number crunching.** Ofsted reported on some changes to the statistical reporting of school inspection outcomes such as including grades from predecessor schools of schools that haven’t yet been inspected which have resulted in a slight drop in the proportion of schools judged good or outstanding from 88% to 86%

Tweets(s) of the week

- “Value for money? What a grim, cold way to talk about universities” - [@jim_dickinson](#)
- “The DfE is considering putting mentors in the classroom with teacher trainees as part of the early careers strategy” - [@Schools Week](#)
- “If you are using IT in the classroom and it is having a positive impact on teaching and learning, no Inspector will have a problem with that [@HarfordSean](#)” - [@ICTEvangelist](#)
- “Thursday June 28 is the perfect day for maths teaching (28 and 6 are both perfect numbers, positive integers equal to the sum of its proper divisors!” - [@Bobby_Seagull](#)
- “Finally handed over my £2 for staffroom sweepstake today. Three days after my team got knocked out of the tournament” - [@MichaelT1979](#)

Other stories of the week

- **What’s in a name?** It’s graduate ceremony time and Sean Coughlan, the BBC education correspondent, had an interesting piece this week on the problems that can arise when an announcer gets the name of the recipient wrong. As former UCAS boss, Mary Curnock Cook tweeted: ‘it reminds me of the rime I was put through to someone with ‘there’s a someone on the phone who says she can’t cook.’”
- **Artists into School.** The winner of this year’s \$1m global teaching prize, Andria Zafirakou who teaches the arts in a school in Brent, London, has announced that she’s going to use the money to set up an ‘Artists’ in Residence’ scheme in schools. The aim will be to get artists of all types to come and work in schools and help inspire young people. The scheme will start in disadvantaged areas in London before rolling out to schools across the UK next year.
- **Operation High Summer.** Many people have a routine set of behaviours that they adopt when the weather gets hot, from requisitioning last year’s shorts to heaving out the paddling pool. The Daily Telegraph offered its slant this week with a list of what it called ‘11 middle-class summer habits,’ such as spending hours trying to pick a good spot for a picnic/lie down/sunbathe.



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Quote(s) of the week

- “We are writing to ask you to support adding the teaching profession as a whole to shortage occupation list” – the TES and union leaders call on the Home and Education Secretaries to change visa rules for teachers
- “We have, per capita, the best university system in the world but it’s being carelessly and utterly stupidly, destroyed very slowly” – Broadcaster Melvyn Bragg takes a swipe at university reforms
- “Pretty much all of the replies to the consultation said funding was too low particularly in FE” – the Chair of the post-18 review tells the AELP Conference about some of the top messages from the recent consultation
- “In schools and classrooms around the UK, a group of children are falling dramatically behind” – the opening sentence of Adoption UK’s latest report on giving adopted children an equal chance in school
- “I think it’s in danger of extinction” – ASCL curriculum lead Suzanne O’Farrell on what seems to be happening to German language teaching in schools in England
- “We are clear that if we see or hear a phone, we’ll confiscate it. And we’ll keep it for a long time. The kids are clear. The parents are clear” – Katherine Birbalsingh, Headmistress at Michaela has clear rules about the use of mobile phones at her school (and they’re rarely breached)

Number(s) of the week

- 95. The number of recorded university student suicides in England and Wales in the year up to July 2017 according to Office for National Statistics figures
- 77%. How many employers are still trying to get their heads around the apprenticeship reforms according to a survey of its members by the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)
- 74%. How many apprenticeship starts last year were delivered by independent training providers working with employers or subcontracted from a college, according to stats from the AELP
- 24.06%. How many FE staff cited working conditions as one of their main worries, according to a survey by the National Education Union (NEU)
- 5%. How much the union for FE has called for by way of a pay rise according to the latest bid
- 0.3% The fall in the number of 16 – 18 year olds in neither education nor an apprenticeship over the 2016 – 17 year, according to latest government figures
- 66,000. The increase in the number of pupils in the school system over the last year (Jan 2017 – Jan 2018,) according to the latest DfE stats
- 17%. How many schools surveyed use some of their pupil premium money to support mental health provision, according to figures gathered by the mental health charity stem4 for a conference this week
- 32. The pass mark for this year’s phonics screening check, the same as it’s been for the previous seven years, according to the latest details from the Standards and Testing Agency
- 54%. The number of parents apparently, who look forward to their kids returning to school in September, according to a YouGov poll for HMRC this week



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What to look out for next week

- FE Week Debate on Apprenticeship reforms (Monday)
- Education Policy Institute Conference on 'The New School Landscape' (Tuesday)
- BTEC Awards Ceremony (Thursday)