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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 11 May 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

No Policy Watch last week so two weeks' worth of developments to catch up on this time. It includes from this week some big reports on intergenerational fairness and mental health along with the continuing build-up to the exam and testing season. And from last week, further analysis and comments on the Education Secretary's keynote speech on school accountability. Plus breaking news on school places.

Those two big reports from this week first, one from the Resolution Foundation taking a sweeping and at times radical look at intergenerational issues, and the other from the Commons Education and Health Committees on children's mental health and the progress, or lack of, of the government's Green Paper on the matter. Each reflects the wider social context within education now sits and the range of issues it faces.

The main thesis from the Resolution Foundation [report](#) is that the unwritten contract between generations is in danger of breaking down. It lists a number of proposals to help remedy this. Most eye-popping perhaps is the proposal to scrap inheritance tax and provide a £10,000 'asset inheritance' for young people to help them with skills, entrepreneurship, housing and pension saving. The report which mirrors much of the global analysis in a new [report](#) by the World Bank has useful recommendations on among other things apprenticeships, technical provision and jobs, with a lot to say on supporting young people most in need.

The tone of the latest [report](#) from the Commons Committees on mental health is reflected in its title: 'failing a generation.' Their view is that the government's Green Paper published last December lacks ambition and tinkers rather than transforms. Interestingly, as we move into the exam season, it calls on the government to conduct independent research on the effects of exam pressure on young people and the impact of a perceived narrowing of the curriculum and its relationship with school accountability.

School accountability was at the heart of the Education Secretary's [speech](#) at the NAHT Annual Conference at the end of last week. The speech has attracted considerable interest and some plaudits for its proposals to simplify what's become an accountability behemoth. The TES provided a helpful [assessment](#) of the speech this week from which arguably three headlines stand out. First, and he said it himself, in policy terms the Education Secretary is for simpler but no less direct solutions. Second, as Fiona Millar argued in her Guardian article this week, there's still a lot to unpick and resolve in how the school system operates. And third, whatever the continuing noise about school funding, the government appears keen to leave things to next year's spending review. The BBC's education correspondent Sean Coughlan has a helpful [summary](#).

Finally, in breaking news, the DfE has responded to its 'Schools that work for everyone' consultation with plans to fund more places in existing grammar schools, plus more free and faith schools. Debate beckons.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Those with influence over FE know too little about it.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Members of new teacher workload panel revealed.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Mental health plans failing a generation, say MPs.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Founding new Oxbridge colleges could help disadvantaged sixth-formers.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Grammar and faith schools get green light to expand.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Intergenerational fairness](#). The Resolution Foundation published the final report from its Intergenerational Commission which has been looking in detail at intergenerational fairness, arguing that the ‘contract’ between generations was breaking down and listing a number of significant reforms for young people as a result
- [More on intergenerational fairness](#). The World Bank Group reported on global generational economic mobility for groups born between 1940 and 1980 finding little progress in some low-income regions such as Africa and South Asia but some improvement in the developed regions of East Asia and the Middle East and citing the importance of targeted government policies accordingly
- [Mental health concerns](#). The Education and Health and Social Care Committees reported on their joint inquiry into the government’s Green Paper on mental health and the role of education, raising concerns that little progress was being made and calling for a more ambitious and concerted effort to avoid letting down a generation of young people
- [Exploiting the workers](#). The independent commission set up last year under Sir David Metcalf to examine exploitation in the workplace, outlined a number of measures including tougher penalties on employers, licensing of car washes and the protection of holiday rights, in a new report

HE

- [Oversight of the SLC](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) reported on its investigation into recent governance issues at the Student Loans Company, noting that the government was in the middle of reviewing the Company’s governance and structure but questioning its lack of oversight in the past
- [Student Loans](#). The government responded to the Treasury Committee’s recent report into student loans which criticized such aspects as the sale of the loan book, the use of the Retail Price Index to set interest rates and weaknesses in the way that the loan system is communicated to students, by effectively pointing to its current review of the system
- [How to widen participation](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) brought together 35 leading commentators to offer their thoughts on how best to widen access to HE, coming up with a range of proposals including curbing unconditional offers, moving to a post-qual admissions system and creating dedicated Oxbridge colleges
- [Top student city](#). London overtook Montreal to seize the top spot as the most favoured city for students in the latest QS World University Rankings with ticks for its opportunities, lifestyle and culture though a cross for its cost of living



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- **Defining vocational.** The Office for Students (OfS) confirmed that it intended to continue the work begun by HEFCE into determining which subjects could be considered vocational and thereby help lead directly into employment, as part of its efforts to ensure prospective students were well informed on choices available
- **Maintenance loans.** Mark Corney, a post-16 education consultant, outlined the important role that loans, especially maintenance loans, play in further and higher education in a new blog for the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- **Foundation Year.** Cambridge University announced plans to model the scheme developed at Lady Margaret Hall Oxford of a foundation year ahead to help support more disadvantaged students from 2020

FE/Skills

- **Different pathways.** The DfE reported on some work examining the effect of different post-16 pathways taken by learners in England and how they had progressed by age 25 showing the importance of achievement at GCSE and of reaching higher levels of education by age 23
- **Skills Shortage Bulletin.** The Edge Foundation launched the first of what is intended to be a series of bulletins on skill issues in key sectors of the economy focusing in this instance on engineering with bulletins on the digi sector and creative industries to follow
- **Industrial Strategy kick start.** The manufacturers' organization, the EEF, followed up concerns about reported flatlining in manufacturing by urging the government to get on with creating the Industrial Strategy Council and other features promised in the Industrial Strategy including the development of Local Industrial Strategies and the role of Sector Deals
- **OTJ Guidance.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) issued updated guidance on the 20% off-the-job training (OTJ) rule for apprenticeships, highlighting what does and doesn't count, the need for an agreed learning plan and illustrating it all with a worked case study
- **Centre based assessment.** Ofqual issued a Call for evidence from Awarding Organisations on how they manage assessments of technical and vocational qualifications undertaken in centres with a view to further possible consultation later
- **Partial immersion.** David Hughes, chief exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC,) wrote a comment piece for the TES outlining the importance of the DfE's latest immersion programme in which civil servants get to understand colleges better by spending some time in them
- **Talk, talk.** Dame Ruth Silver, President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) blogged about the important role the organization was trying to play in bringing together and providing a platform for a sharing of ideas on FE and more
- **An inspector writes.** An HMI and lead for careers guidance talked through the process of inspecting aspects of further education and skills in a new blog on the Ofqual website



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Schools

- **School places.** The government responded to its (2016) consultation on diversifying and expanding the school system by confirming plans to expand places in existing grammar or outstanding selective schools, support more free and faith schools and set up a new Partnerships Unit to encourage more partnership activity such as that between universities and schools
- **Teacher workload.** The DfE announced the members and remit of the new panel which will look at teacher workload, building on the work of the previous panels but focusing in particular on data collection and management and due to report back before the end of this summer term
- **School accountability.** The DfE set out its initial 'high-level' principles for how school accountability should operate ahead of wider consultation later this year
- **Brake, U-turn, or?** William Stewart of the Times Ed offered a helpful analysis of the Education Secretary's keynote speech last week to the NAHT Conference on school accountability reforms, reflecting in more detail on the thinking behind it and what it all means
- **Money, money, money.** The BBC's Education correspondent, Sean Coughlan, considered how things stood in the current school funding campaign suggesting that for the government at least, things may be pushed to next year's Spending Review
- **Career progression.** The DfE responded to its recent consultation on improving teacher careers and progression confirming that it intends to extend the induction period for new teachers to two years and to pilot work-related sabbaticals for more established (10 years or more) teachers
- **Invitation to bid.** The government invited bids from organisations interested in running the new National Centre of Computing Education, announced as part of the Industrial Strategy last year, due to be developed later this year and to start training computer science teachers from next year
- **Northern way.** The Chair of the Education Committee followed up last week's witness session with the former Chancellor and other reps from the Northern Powerhouse Partnership by calling on the Education Secretary to explain what action his dept was taking to improve education standards and opportunities in the North
- **Governors' checklist.** The DfE set out a 10-point checklist to help school governors and managers assess whether they were using finances and resources efficiently
- **High Needs Funding.** The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) highlighted some of the issues around high needs funding in a new document published as part of its recent Annual Conference
- **30 years on.** Education commentator Fiona Millar examined how far school system reforms have improved prospects for parents and children in the 30 years since the passing of the 1988 (Baker) Education Reform Act in a new book entitled 'The Best for My Child. Did the schools market deliver?'
- **Supporting mental health in schools and colleges.** The DfE published a series of case studies illustrating the various approaches being taken by a range of schools, colleges and other educational institutions in tackling the issue of mental health
- **Science practicals.** Ofqual published research appearing to allay fears that changes to the recognition of practicals in A' level Sciences would lead to them being downplayed, finding that in Biology at least, it had actually boosted practical skills



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Tweets(s) of the week

- 'Happy birthday to us - it's 49 years since the OU was established by Royal Charter in 1969' - [@Open University](#)
- 'It's a hidden nasty: Parents in dark over need to top up student loans' - [@GuardianEdu](#)
- "The phrase 'I heard that,' 'I don't know the full story but,' 'A school near me,' 'A friend told me,' have done/are doing more to keep the fear of inspection unjustifiably high and is lining the pockets of consultants who make money out of that fear" - [@HarfordSean](#)
- "In schools, it is rapidly becoming the case that unless an action is recorded it hasn't happened...one teacher talks frankly about workload" - [@teshelen](#)
- "AI can predict your personality just by how your eyes move" - [@newscientist](#)
- 'We are more informed than ever – but still rush to judgement' - [@Skapinker](#)

Other stories of the week

- What makes for a top student city? As has been reported this week, London has emerged as the top city for students in the latest QS World University Rankings. Last year it was 3rd so at a time when concerns remain about the effect of Brexit on future student numbers, there's considerable relief that London has done so well. But what's it all judged on? Broadly there are a number of defined categories including university rankings, student mix, desirability, affordability and student view. Although London hasn't come out that well on affordability, it has on desirability and student view in particular, each of which has helped propel London to the top. Details of how the rankings work can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "While today's young adults have been much more likely to work, they have been very poorly rewarded for doing so"- the Resolution Foundation highlights the plight of many millennials
- "The time for woolly ideas is over" – the HE Policy Institute goes for radical options to help widen HE access
- "After 30 years of go compare,' English education is a wild west" – The Guardian trails a new book on the school system reforms by columnist Fiona Millar
- "But I do wonder if there is really a need at age 16 for young people to choose between a wholly academic and wholly technical route" – Education Committee Chair Rob Halfon reflects on the dual route
- "All schools should include education on social media as part of PSHE" – one of the recommendations from the Joint Education and Health Committee report on young people's mental health
- "Pupils caught drinking from plastic bottles will be treated like smokers behind bike sheds" – the headmaster of a top independent school gets tough on plastic

Number(s) of the week

- £24bn. The likely increase in public spending for health, care and social security needed by 2030 according to the Resolution Foundation

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- 17. The number of work sectors from nail bars to car washes where slavery and mistreatment of workers is rife according to a report from the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)
- 3.1m. The number of children from working households expected to be growing up in poverty in 2018, an increase of 1m since 2010, according to research published by the TUC
- 40. The number of universities that have created MBA level apprenticeship courses over the last year according to research quoted by the FT
- 12. The average number of cyber-attacks a week against UK colleges in the first quarter of this year according to evidence from JISC and reported by the TES
- 104. The number of leading artists and creative leaders who signed a letter to The Guardian condemning the exclusion of the arts from the EBacc and calling on the government to recognize the sector's importance

What to look out for next week

- Education Questions in the House of Commons (Monday)
- Learning at Work Week (Monday – Sunday)
- SATs Week (Monday – Thursday)
- Education Committee witness session on apprenticeships and skills training (Tuesday)
- National Numeracy Day (Wednesday)