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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 1 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.

T Levels have hogged most of the headlines this week with lots of commentary and analysis in the wake of the announcements over the last weekend.

Other developments this week have seen Institutes of Technology move a step nearer (for some) and the bidding process launched for post-16 maths Centres of Excellence. Elsewhere, the government confirmed ring fenced funding for SEND provision and published the test papers and mark schemes for this year's SATs. Meanwhile, the Guardian published its latest ranking for universities, the Sutton Trust and NFER published a report on Free Schools and the OECD's Director of Education and Skills launched a weighty tome on school system reform. And for those who've always wondered, research in America has revealed that yes, taking exams and tests in hot weather can have an adverse effect on student performance. It starts to kick in apparently at anything above 21c; click on Wednesday's headline below for the full story.

But it's back to [T Levels](#) for the main news this week.

For those less familiar, and that includes a lot of employers apparently, T Levels represent a significant moment in this country's attempt to mirror the continent by developing a high-quality technical route for young people. The PM has perhaps rashly already referred to T Levels on numerous occasions as 'the most significant reform to advanced technical education in 70 years' and they represent a potentially defining political test for the current Education Secretary as Stephen Exley in the [TES](#) and John Blake from the think tank [Policy Exchange](#), have identified.

Part of the reason for this sense of history is the long legacy, some would say of over a century or more, in failed attempts at creating such a route in the past. It's something the government recognises in its response document, listing three reasons (they are distinctive, streamlined and based on occupational mapping) as to why T Levels have a better chance of succeeding than the most recent effort in the shape of 14-19 Diplomas. One could also add to this the fact that the wider conditions for reform are now more favourable with the economy seeking new skillsets, more young people now looking for quality alternative routes, and concerns emerging about the depth of the talent pool post-Brexit.

A lot of hard work of course lies ahead. Page 13 of the government's response lists some of the immediate priorities but fundamentally they include: resolving the status of T Levels and of 'other' related qualifications, think BTECs; clarifying system entry and exit points or transition and progression in the jargon; tidying up the dual grading system; making good the promises on industry placements; developing the promised funding allocation system; making sure the procurement process works and the 'comms' challenge' is met.



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Top headlines this week

- 'A new technical education route is needed post-18.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Free schools boost for England's worst performing areas.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Hotter years means lower exam results.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Parents 'not involved' in new Free Schools. ([Thursday](#))
- 'Colleges face £174m exams bill.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [How to build a 21st c school system](#). The OECD's Director for Education and Skills Andreas Schleicher, built on a mound of research and analysis to produce a detailed and thought provoking report on how to build a modern school system, outlining the issues, myths and challenges involved and identifying 5 systems (Canada, Estonia, Finland, Singapore and Shanghai) as beacons of excellence
- [Reach for the sky](#). The consultancy PwC examined the potential impact of Drones on the UK economy suggesting that while their use/impact may vary by sector, collectively they could generate 628,000 jobs and boost the economy by £42bn by 2030
- [More on AI](#). The RSA delved into the issue of 'ethical AI,' what it means and how the public can be involved and share in the development of Artificial Intelligence as a public tool generally

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- [University Guide 2019](#). The Guardian published its university 'league table' for 2019 based on criteria such as quality of teaching, student satisfaction and also for the first time this year, a new continuation measure, leading to some less familiar names such as Nottingham Trent and Lincoln shooting up the table but leaving the top ten, starting with Oxbridge, remaining much as before
- [Reaching out](#). The Office for Students (OfS) published the first annual report on the National Collaborative Outreach Programme which sees local providers and agencies working together to help young people, particularly those from underrepresented groups, consider higher ed showing that over the last year it had worked with over 50,000 13-18 yr olds
- [It's down to you](#). An article in the newssheet for international students questioned how far universities should be held responsible for future employability arguing that a lot of it is down to the individual
- [2 for 1](#). Richmond, the London based American International University, received UK degree awarding powers making it unique in being able to offer UK and US (dual) degrees

FE/Skills

- [T Level developments](#). The DfE issued its long-awaited response to its earlier consultation on T Level implementation setting out how it was responding to consultation feedback and outlining future steps forward for the development of T levels



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- **Getting technical.** The DfE issued a further paper alongside its consultation response, aimed largely at Awarding Organisations, with more technical detail about the design, development, assessment and grading of T Levels
- **Quick thoughts.** The Institute for Apprenticeships called for initial thoughts (by 10 June) on the outline content for the first three T Levels
- **IoT Stage 2.** The government announced that 16 bids for Institute of Technology status have been given the green light to proceed to the next stage which includes developing a full business plan and applying for capital funding
- **Centres of Excellence.** The DfE launched the process for centres wishing to apply to become Centres of Excellence in providing maths for post-16 students with low prior achievement, with applications due in 10 July 2018
- **Apprenticeship Plans.** The government gave the Institute for Apprenticeships its orders for 2018/19 in the form of new Strategic Guidance with the Institute looking to be busier than ever as it picks up responsibility for technical education as well
- **Funding rules.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) made a welcome announcement that for the coming year (August 2018-July 2019) it was trialling a system of fully funding provision for adults on low wages rather than just those on benefits
- **Funding explainer.** The Institute for Apprenticeships published a Q and A sheet on how funding is being assigned under the new band structure for apprenticeships
- **Future connectivity.** Ian Pretty, chief exec of the Collab Group of colleges reflected on the provision of digital services for colleges in the future and the potential for the Group itself to take a leading role as a broker of services

Schools

- **SEN places.** The DfE announced plans to ring fence a further £50m to help increase the number of school places and facilities for children with special educational needs (SEN)
- **Free for All?** The Sutton Trust and NFER reported on the Free School programme concluding that although many serve deprived areas in need of school places and have high levels of performance, they are increasingly being developed by academy trusts rather than parents and are in danger of losing their way as innovative providers
- **Alternative Providers.** FFT Education Datalab and the charity The Difference reported on its research into independent alternative provision in England finding that provision varies widely across the country but that generally it receives poorer inspection ratings than state alternatives
- **SATs mop up.** The Standards and Testing Agency put out for public consumption the test papers and mark schemes used in this year's SATs

Tweets(s) of the week

- 'When they had a meeting coming up, people got 22% less done in the same amount of time. To enhance productivity, stack meetings back-to-back instead of spreading them throughout the day' - [@AdamMGrant](#)



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- '54% of workplaces have rated their understanding of T Levels as either middling or poor according to research by @AELPUK' - @tes
- 'Passionately arguing against things that don't actually happen in schools to sell a course on how not to do the thing that doesn't actually happen in schools is my new business model' - @tstarkey1212

Other stories of the week

- What shall we teach the children? Anyone working in schools will be wearily familiar with the constant calls, when a societal problem has been identified, to solving it by putting it on the school curriculum. 'Can't boil an egg...they should teach it in schools;' 'can't tie you shoe laces...didn't the teachers show you?' Whether it's resolving street violence or social etiquette, just tack it on to the school curriculum. This week, Gabriel Milland, who was Head of Comms at the DFE between 2011 and 2015 published a fascinating list of topics that had been put forward for inclusion on the school curriculum while he was at the department. They range from the sensible such as dealing with anorexia to the well, 'what a cow looks like.' A link to the list is [here](#)
- E mail etiquette. Apparently a new tag is beginning to appear under some email signatories. It runs: 'I am sending this email at the weekend because it fits with my schedule this week. This does not imply an expectation that you respond outside of your working hours.' It's a tag that many are welcoming

Quote(s) of the week

- "So yes, budgets are tight. There is no denying that. But it is also the case that there is more money going into schools across the piece than there used to be" – the Education Secretary maintains a straight bat when challenged over school funding on the Marr Show
- "Every school is different and every school leadership team is different. And so no experience of inspection is identical to any other" –Ofsted's Sean Harford explains in his latest blog, why no two school inspections are the same
- "At the moment this levy is a bottomless pit of venom, poisoning a training scheme that this country so desperately needs" – Charlie Mullins, founder of Pimlico Plumbers appears no fan of the apprenticeship levy system in its current form
- "The biggest risk to schooling today isn't its inefficiency, but that our way of schooling is losing its purpose and relevancy" – the OECD's Andreas Schleicher blogs about some starting points for his new book on building a 21stc school system
- "Education needs to be a lot more fun" – Sir Anthony Seldon welcomes the growth of education and other cultural festivals for bringing some of the joy and excitement back to life

Number(s) of the week

- 76,000. The number of drones likely to be in use across UK skies by 2030 according to a new report by PwC
- 16. The number of Institute of Technology (IoT) business proposals that have been given the green light to proceed to the business planning stage according to the government
- 430. The number of responses received to the government's T level implementation consultation, the majority from FE, according to the DfE



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- 40,000. How many additional mainstream school places the government is intending to provide for by 2020/21, slightly down on its original aspiration, according to Schools Week
- 44%. The number of teachers, generally middle and senior leaders, who undertook three or more after school activities including meetings over the last week, Bank Holiday or not, according to Teacher Tapp
- 4.1%. The number of 10 and 11 yr olds in Year 6 of their schooling who are classed as severely obese, according to research published by the Local Government Association (LGA)
- 63%. How many people think things are worse now than when they were growing up against 21% who think it's better, according to recent research from Demos and Sky Data

What to look out for next week

- HE Policy Institute Annual Conference (Thursday)