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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 30 November 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.

Quite a spread of developments to take in this week.

A large chunk of it concerns higher education. This includes: the latest in the DfE commissioned series on graduate earnings; the first batch of data from UCAS summarising entry trends and data for university entry this year; a new report and [consultation](#) on degree classification; a [report](#) from the Reform think tank on progress or lack of in widening participation; a [provider survey](#) from the body representing independent providers; a [call](#) for an employer-based 'graduate levy;' and an interesting [global collection](#) of 'what I would do if I was in charge of HE' views reported in the Times Higher. Quite a spread and further evidence of the extent of the debate around UK HE at present, and that's before any mention of Brexit.

Elsewhere this week we've had [consultation](#) launched on funding T level delivery, and [details](#) on the new Apprenticeship Provider Register with the Register due to open for new business in ten days' time while many apprenticeships let alone apprentices themselves received recognition at this week's annual National Apprenticeship Awards. And for schools, independent schools have been in Conference, Ofqual has published [a bunch of reports](#) on the quality of marking and the DfE has issued some [safety notices](#) on a number of areas of potential interest to schools.

A lot happening as ever and all listed below but given the mass of activity around it, this week's mention goes to HE and in particular to two reports which have generated a lot of headlines and discussion.

First the latest [report](#) from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) on graduate early-career earnings. This is part of a more lengthy series of studies but remains prominent partly because of the current debate around the cost-benefit ratio of going to university and partly because salary returns are becoming part of the metrics being used by government to assess performance. As many pointed out university brings many more benefits than projected salary returns and anyway as David Kernohan powerfully explained in an [article](#) on Wonkhe, comparing graduate returns in different parts of the country doesn't get you very far as salary levels can be very different. Either way the report allowed the Minister to claim the university experience was worth it especially for females although it contained some important caveats.

Second, this year's [consignment of data and analysis from UCAS](#) on university entry 2018. As in recent years, UCAS in releasing this in batches over the next few weeks with provider-level data due in January 2019. The first batch, which came out this week, concentrates on offers and acceptances but includes for the first time, details on the growing issue of unconditional offers which saw the Education Secretary out early to, in the [words of the FT](#), 'slam the rise in the practice.'

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Top headlines this week

- 'Providers must reapply for apprenticeship register.' ([Monday](#))
- 'The biggest winners and losers from degrees.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Ofqual looking at alternatives to exam marking.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Unconditional offers used to get people through the door.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Private school caps value of Christmas gifts for teachers.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Brexit letter](#). The Prime Minister wrote an open letter to the nation, setting out her perspective on some of the Brexit issues, including jobs and free movement, following the signing off of the Withdrawal Agreement by EU leaders at the weekend
- [We have a plan](#). The Dept for Work and Pensions (DWP) published its latest departmental plan covering among other things, plans to help more people into work and progressing their careers, completing the roll out of Universal Credit and looking at the case for a mid-life savings and pension MOT
- [National Minimum Wage](#). The Low Pay Commission released its latest report on the national minimum wage showing young apprentices in particular having to cope with low wage growth and high levels of underpayment and with only modest (20p) increases in wages for 2019
- '[Something's wrong with our system.](#)' Emma Hardy MP, a member of the Education Committee told the TES what she had learnt on the Committee's recent fact-finding tour of Germany and Switzerland looking at vocational provision and progression
- [College wellbeing](#). The Education Guardian reported that the Royal Northern College of Music was to become the first musical college to appoint a lecturer in student health and wellbeing, an issue that had become particularly prominent among musicians in recent years

HE

- [Graduate returns](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) published the second in its series of reports commissioned by the DfE, looking in this instance into the returns on earnings for graduates up to age 29, showing most, particularly female graduates, with higher levels of earning return than non-graduates though with a lot depending on prior attainment, course and institution type
- [Uni entry 2018](#). UCAS published the first batch of its comprehensive data on 2018 university entry patterns covering in this first instance applicant offers and acceptances and, for the first time, details on unconditional offers showing a notable rise in the latter, with an upward trend in acceptances for 18 yr olds and for international applicants overall
- [Degree classification](#). University groups examined some of the factors behind the recent increase in the award of top degrees recognising the need to ensure continued public confidence and supporting the consultation being run by QAA looking into proposals for strengthening the degree classification system



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- **Gaining access.** The Reform think tank reported on the progress being made by high-tariff universities in recruiting more students from disadvantaged backgrounds showing little progress being made over the last five years and calling for more focused measures to be adopted as a result
- **An employer levy?** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a briefing paper by an outreach consultant arguing, perhaps less popularly in some quarters, for employers who recruit graduates to be more responsible for paying tuition fees through a repayment system to universities for each graduate they recruit as part of a more aligned system
- **The view from the independents.** Independent Higher Ed (IHE,) the membership body for independent providers of HE, published the results of its latest survey into members and their views, finding most offering degree courses and applying for OfS registration although with varying amounts of diverse provision, keen to pursue international and research activities but generally concerned about Brexit
- **In need of a bail out.** Gordon McKenzie, chief executive of GuildHE looked further into the issue of bail outs arguing that the approach being adopted in FE could teach HE a thing or two

FE/Skills

- **Apprenticeship Provider register.** The government published the details for its new beefed up Register of Apprenticeships Training Providers (RoATP) which will mean all providers, even those currently registered, will need to register in time and meet tougher rules on quality controls and financial stability with a funding cap for sub-contractors
- **Funding T level delivery.** The DfE launched consultation on funding T level delivery, proposing an emerging model that would see the per student funding rate fall into one of four funding bands with additional funding for the industry placement and a one-off payment where English and maths is needed
- **Opportunities through Apprenticeships.** The government announced the launch of a new scheme to increase the number of people from disadvantaged communities taking up apprenticeships with the launch of pilots schemes in four areas: Portsmouth, Nottingham, South Tyneside and Torbay, that will run through to 2020
- **Access to apprenticeships.** Shadow Skills Minister Gordon Marsden called for better access and support for apprenticeships especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds in a new blog as part of the Sutton Trust's Better Apprenticeships campaign
- **Social care workforce.** The think tank IPPR issued a report on the social care workforce indicating a likely shortage of over 400,000 such workers over the next decade and arguing that many working in social care suffer from low pay and deserve better treatment
- **Skills Taskforce.** The Local Government Association (LGA) announced that it was bringing together a group of industry experts to consider issues arising out of Brexit and the Industrial Strategy with a view to publishing recommendations next summer

Schools

- **Staying secure.** The DfE launched consultation on new non-statutory guidance for schools and those who work with schools on ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place to cope with security related incidents
- **Controlling access to school premises.** The DfE outlined the rules for schools who should or shouldn't have access to school premises pointing to what rights they have if push comes to shove



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- [Quality of marking](#). Ofqual published a series of research reports on aspects of exam marking in England covering such areas as online standardization, marking consistency and hard to mark responses, suggesting areas where possible improvements might be made
- [National curriculum assessments](#). The Standards and Testing Agency reported on the number of investigations carried out for the Key stage 1 and 2 tests last year, showing an increase on the previous year mainly at KS2, with a corresponding increase in the number of results amended or annulled
- [Crisis what crisis?](#) The research consultancy ComRes published the results of its survey, commissioned by the National Association of Headteachers, on MPs' views on school funding showing over half agreeing that there is a funding crisis but with views on how serious this is differing along Party lines
- [As important as pi](#). The FT reported on a new government supported programme, being headed by Raspberry Pi, STEM Learning and the British Computer Society, which will provide staff training, resources and support over the next four years to ensure all children in England are taught computer science by trained staff
- [Computer Education](#). Education commentator and computing expert Bob Harrison looked at some of the issues around computer education in schools and how far the National Centre for Computer Education will be able to help, in an article for SecEd
- [Team work](#). The charity Parentkind reported on its latest survey of parents showing that 85% were supportive of their child's school with a similar number keen to play an active role though over half of parents surveyed wanted schools to be more accountable to them

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Sound argument from @RSAMatthew. After yrs of being inspected, disparaged and starved it's time for #localgov to grab the keys off the jailers. I propose an indep commission sponsored by #localgov to forensically inquire into the failings of central gov" - @NickGolding
- "The arts are a key part of a broad and balanced curriculum - that's why we invest more into arts education programmes than any subject other than PE & why music, art and design are compulsory in the National Curriculum up to the age of 14" - @DamianHinds
- "When I was in school, I was 'internally excluded' quite early on. They had tried everything till then and this was the last step before external exclusion, then permanent. I never misbehaved after that. I didn't have an unmet need. I was just a little turd who needed to be told" - @adamboxer1
- "Sure there certainly is a serious issue but so far I'm not seeing any significant downside. Most of my teaching career I was living from pay cheque to pay cheque. If someone wanted to give me a bottle of Aramis or a pair of tickets to the ballet I would have been bloody delighted" - @tombennett71
- "Thought for the day. Should INSET days be replaced with professional reading days? 5 days of academic reading would be pretty transformative" - @MrBlachford
- "Even if you spend five days getting people to proofread something they'll find a typo in it two minutes after you've sent it to 622 people" - @StuartLock
- "Of course as a scientist, I am still weighing up the evidence for and against Father Christmas; until I do I'm keeping my options open" - @gittner



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Other stories of the week

- [How educational technology has changed over the last 50 years](#). The days of the blackboard may seem a distant memory if remembered at all by many teachers today so just how has educational technology changed over recent years? Here, courtesy of Tony Parkin, who describes himself as a ‘Disruptive Nostalgist & Educational Technologist,’ is a fascinating list of some familiar and perhaps less familiar examples of what bits of kit teachers have grappled with in classrooms over the years. And yes, the OHP and whiteboard are both in there as monuments to different ages.
- [Do we really need all this mentoring malarkey?](#) According to the education blogger Donald Clark, the answer to that question is a firm ‘No.’ In a recent comment piece, he listed seven reasons why he thought mentoring was in one phrase ‘a one person trap.’

Quote(s) of the week

- “Higher education is delivering for students, the taxpayers and the economy and will continue to do so as long as we focus relentlessly on quality” – the HE Minister responds to the latest research into the earnings returns of young graduates
- “The government wants to normalize the idea of thinking about the quality of university teaching via graduate earnings” – David Kernohan, Associate Editor at Wonkhe, offers a deeper perspective on the latest research into early-career graduate earnings
- “Reassuringly expensive? France hikes international student fees to counter perception that ultra-cheap tuition is a sign of poor quality” - [@CHavergalTHE](#)
- “There could be one benefit to Mrs May’s ‘brightest and best immigration policy.’ We may not notice the people doing those less-esteemed jobs; we will notice them when they are no longer here...and perhaps that will lead to a re-evaluation of local training and education ...and of snobbery towards those who do the work we would never consider doing” – FT columnist Michael Skapinker on snobbery towards vocational learning
- “In December, the Department plans to publish a ready reckoner, which is a self-service calculation tool that will allow schools to estimate their allocations. The final allocations are expected to be published in the new year” – The School Standards Minister outlines plans for how schools will be able to spend the ‘little extras’ money
- “I think schools are in the dark ages on part-time working compared with any other industry you can think of” – former journalist turned teacher Lucy Kellaway on one area where teaching needs to change
- “Can you provide examples of how your school currently deters and restricts the risk of weapons being brought into schools?” – one of the questions in the new consultation on school security

Number(s) of the week

- 85%. How many graduates on average (67% male and 99% female) attended a university that helped significantly enhance earnings returns by age 29 compared to their peers who didn’t go to university, according to new research from the IfS
- 54%. The number of MPs who acknowledge that there is a funding crisis in schools according to a survey undertaken by ComRes for the NAHT



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- 29,255. The number of new entrants to postgrad initial teacher training this year, 2000+ up on last year, according to latest DfE data
- 66%. How many parents surveyed wanted their child's school to be more accountable to them, according to new research from the charity Parentkind
- 260. How many school building projects have been completed under the Priority Schools Building Programme (PSBP) according to the Treasury's latest list of infrastructure projects
- 47. The average age of examiners surveyed, according to a new report from Ofqual
- 599. The number of maladministration investigations carried out into last year's KS1 and KS2 tests, according to data released by the Standards and Testing Agency
- 45%. How many 16 and 17 yr olds in a survey reckoned that the Relationship and Sex Education they received at school was good or very good with a further 39% saying it was OK, according to a poll published by the National Education Union and Sex Education Forum
- 10%. The amount by which Millfield School is planning to cut the fees it charges parents which currently run at an annual £38,000, according to an announcement by the school

What to look out for next week

- Reform roundtable on 'The Potential for AI in mental health.' (Tuesday)
- Second report in the UCAS 'End of Cycle' series. (Thursday)