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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 14 September 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 let-up for education this week with some heavyweight reports in terms of both size and impact, a disturbing trend and some important commentary and debates.

Those heavyweight reports first, all listed below but where three stand out.

First the OECD's annual sweep through how education systems in member countries are performing. The [report](#) has more tables than Furniture land but is littered with valuable data which politicians are often quick to reference. For the UK there were some familiar headlines, some more favourable such as the increase in tertiary attainment levels and the autonomy afforded schools, others less so, such as the pay gap between different levels of teacher and the difficulties faced by those with poor levels of qualification. The [TES](#) and [Schools Week](#) both have good summaries.

Second, international students, much in the news this week with a [speech](#) by Diane Abbott and reports from the [HE Commission](#) and the [Migration Advisory Committee](#) (MAC.) The big government commissioned MAC report was labelled 'a disappointment' by many in higher ed, even '[woefully disappointing](#)' by HEPI'S Nick Hillman, all hoping to see evidence of a more welcoming attitude to such students. In fact, as [WonkHE](#) noted, the report ends up changing things very little; there's some flexing around post-study arrangements but international students are to remain within the net migration target. Annex H has the reasoning.

Third, the TES has been reporting for much of the week about the new report from the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) [Commission on school accountability](#). Launched earlier this year, the Commission has made a number of significant recommendations including more use of comparative data, more research around the nature of inspections and a greater role in school improvement for school leaders.

Next, that disturbing trend. Apparently an average of 18 people a day in the UK take their own lives; this was one of the stats that emerged as part of World Suicide Prevention Day at the start of this week. It's a sad fact that it afflicts education like other parts of society and it's been good to see bodies such as [Young Minds](#), [Universities UK](#) and [Mind](#) come up with resources and guidance for those working with young people

Finally a quick gallop through some of the other commentary and debates from this week. They include: a fascinating [reflection](#) on the state of the UK economy 10 years after the financial crash by the IfS; an interesting [perspective](#) on the department store concept of colleges by the head of the AoC; the latest [take](#) on where we are with the post-18 review by the BBC's Sean Coughlan; some [reflections](#) on Ofsted from Fiona Millar, and [6 points](#) from this week's MP's education questions from Schools Week.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Tuition fees review to wait on loans decision.' ([Monday](#))
- 'How UK education ranks in the world.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'College performance improving, Ofsted reveals.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Parents using 'dubious tactics' to beat school admissions criteria.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Students blamed for college cyber-attacks.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [UK Education at a Glance 2018](#). The OECD published its latest annual compendium into how education systems across 30+ member countries are performing, showing the UK with high levels of participation at pre-school and higher ed but with continuing issues of access and under-performance by some disadvantaged groups
- [10 years on](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) provided a fascinating reflection on the state of the UK economy (high employment, low earning growth) 10 years after the 2008 financial crash
- [Missing the point](#). The Chair of the Lords Economic Committee wrote to the Education Secretary expressing disappointment that he'd failed to address some of the points in the Committee's recent report such as those on student loans and apprenticeships, and asking him to revisit them in due course
- [4 x 9 – 5](#). The TUC called for a new future of work commission to look at the impact of technology on work practices and argued for a four-day working week to become 'a realistic ambition for the 21stc' as part of its Annual Conference this week
- [Workers' rights](#). John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor promised at the TUC Conference that a Labour government would extend workers' rights to gig workers, set up a Ministry of Labour, introduce sector bargaining and encourage more worker share - ownership of companies
- [Mental health matters](#). The Education Policy Institute considered the issues around student mental health and the importance of supportive systems in a new briefing to mark World Suicide Prevention Day
- [Mental health at work gateway](#). The mental health charity, Mind with support from Prince William, launched its new gateway portal of help, support and advice for employers and employees coping with mental health issues at work
- [Online Forums Bill](#). Lucy Powell MP outlined the new Private Members Bill she was introducing aimed at holding social media companies and their moderators to account for the content of their platforms particularly in cases of incitement of hatred and/or abuse
- [How the UK can win the AI race](#). KPMG outlined five 'policy prescriptions,' some short, some medium and one long-term, ranging from Data Innovation Zones to digital upskilling in schools
- [The Impact of AI on work](#). Frontier Economics published the results of its evidence review into the impact of artificial intelligence on work prepared for the Royal Society and British Academy, concluding that it's already having some impact, it may not all be bad news but it may polarize work roles



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HE

- **International students.** The Migration Advisory Committee published its report, commissioned by the previous Home Secretary into the arrangements around international students, recommending some changes to study/work visas but not to taking such students out of net migration targets
- **More on international students.** The HE Commission listed 12 ways to protect and support international higher education in a new report including simplifying and targeting Tier 4 arrangements, reviewing the number of English language test centres and clarifying the status for EU students post 2020
- **Running into delays.** The BBC and others reported that the post – 18 review will take longer to report back than anticipated given the need to take into account the work of the ONS work on whether student loans should be reported in the public finances, which is not due until the end of the year
- **Lifetime benefits.** The Open University published the results of work undertaken by London Economics looking at the potential returns to an average learner competing a part-time degree in their mid-30s, suggesting in some cases a £377,000 cash terms increase in lifetime earnings
- **Prevent monitoring.** The Office for Students published the latest version of the monitoring framework, with expectations remaining the same but with some changes to annual reporting such as any change in provider responsibilities, and with greater use of review meetings
- **Policy Handbook.** GuildHE published the latest version of its brief guide to HE policy and regulation intended to help any hard-pressed Student Union officers at the start of a new academic year
- **Take 5.** The Student Loans Company issued five steps students could take to avoid being the subject of fraud particularly at the start of a new academic year when personal details and financial transactions are in greater evidence

FE/Skills

- **Panel beating.** The DfE announced the membership of nine new T level industry-led panels helping to develop T levels for 2022 and 2023
- **Unlocking social mobility.** The 5% Club, the group of employers committed to improving training opportunities for young people, called for FE funding to be ‘stabilised,’ the apprenticeship levy to be extended to a skills levy and for improved work experience and careers advice as part of a new report on improving social mobility
- **Never Too Late.** The Institution of Mechanical Engineers working with the Gatsby Foundation called for more to be done to attract potential female apprentices taking arts subjects as well as those who often make their career choices later in education
- **Essential digital skills.** The government published its latest digital skills framework, the framework designed to help those supporting adults to develop their digital skills and now updated to include some more specific skills for progression

Schools

- **Improving school accountability.** The National Association of Head Teachers’ Accountability Commission published its report into school accountability outlining eight principles, including fairness, transparency and valued by all, for the development of a future accountability system
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- [Discovering more about school accountability](#). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reported on its evidence review of how accountability is used in different school systems concluding that it can distort teaching and learning if not applied appropriately
- [Secondary choice](#). The Education Policy Institute examined how parents went about making their choice of secondary school noting that while 85% get their top preference, there are significant differences between different regions and different parent groups
- [Parent Power](#). The Sutton Trust published a further report on tactics used in school admissions procedures five years on from its original findings, suggesting that practices that favour the more advantaged are continuing and calling for parents to be made more aware of their rights and priority given to pupil premium students when places are oversubscribed
- [A national plan for RE](#). The Commission on Religious Education, set up a couple of years ago to report on the future of RE in schools and colleges in England published its final report under the title of 'Religion and Worldviews,' calling for a new entitlement for all pupils built around nine expectations
- [Savings the arts](#). The groups championing the arts in schools issued a new toolkit designed to provide information and tools for those campaigning for the arts
- [Inspecting SEND](#). Ofsted blogged about the approach it takes when inspecting providers of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- [Ofsted for good?](#) Education Guardian columnist Fiona Millar offered her reflections on Ofsted and its potential as a force for good, especially in an age that relies heavily on data measurement
- [Transforming the pupil premium](#). Professor Becky Allen published her detailed thoughts, presented in summary form at last weekend's ResearchED conference, on why the pupil premium in its current form wasn't working and needed reforming
- [National Reference Test](#). Ofqual confirmed that the 2019 NRT will be held between 25 Feb and 8 March 2019

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Eldest's maths homework includes: 'would you rather have 3 boxes with 10 biscuits in or 5 boxes with 5 biscuits in? Explain your reasoning. He put I'd rather have 5 x 5 because I don't like biscuits and is refusing to accept that that's not what they mean by reasoning" - [@FelicityHannah](#)
- "Interesting use of the apprenticeship levy. Sheffield University spends part of its levy money to pay for its senior managers to take its own MBAs" - [@JMorganTHE](#)
- "Minister of Loneliness [@tracey_crouch](#) has said that modern technology is fueling more loneliness: remote workers are becoming isolated and young people are failing to build face-to-face relationships" - [@reformthinktank](#)
- "Lightbulb moment of the day. I can't help thinking that the catalyst for everything going downhill was the cancellation of Top of the Pops" - [@shadylady222](#)

Other stories of the week

- [What I wish I'd known at 18](#). For many people, this is 'pack up your car' weekend as they prepare to unload offspring at university. There's been a lot of advice in the media about what prospective students should take or not, including the now notorious Waitrose culinary list that included rose harissa paste.

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Pearson

This week the FT asked a group of columnists, comedians and others what they wish they'd known when they were aged 18. "The thing I regret most is spending too much time in the college bar with people moaning about stuff" is one suggestion.

- [The Twits and more](#). Thursday of this week saw the latest annual Roald Dahl day with a reminder of some of his fantastically created language known as 'Gobblefunk' and just how many amazing characters he also created.

Quote(s) of the week

- "We take the use of public money very seriously and will not tolerate those who try to exploit the system for personal gain" – the Academies Minister defends Academies in the BBC's Panorama programme
- "I think Ofsted do a very, very worthwhile and high quality job" – the Education Secretary responds to questions in Parliament following the recent Public Accounts Committee report on Ofsted
- "We are disappointed" – Universities UK reacts to the Migration Advisory Committee recommendations on international students
- "Our job is to encourage students that have a history of poor mental health to disclose it before they even arrive at university" – the Chair of UUK's mental health group urges students and universities to work together as part of World Suicide Prevention Day
- "Higher education policy is a bit confusing at the moment" – GuildHE gets to grips with HE policy in its latest policy guide
- "If the 20th brought us the weekend, a typical four-day week is a plausible ambition for the 21st" – the TUC weighs up the case for a four-day week
- "In 2015 we set an ambitious goal of three million apprenticeship starts by 2020, and that remains our ambition" – the Skills Minister sticks to the apprenticeship target/ambition
- "This is a little bit 20th century" Ofsted starts to move from inspection reporting via forms to tablets
- "Coming to the library is my favourite part of school" – the Scottish Government hears from young people as it launches a first ever UK national strategy for school libraries

Number(s) of the week

- £25,700. Median real household income currently, up over the last 10 years but £4,200 lower than what they might have been if they had grown at the same rate as before the 2008 economic crisis, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 2.6%. How much average total pay rose in the three months to July 2018 compared to the same period last year, according to the latest official figure
- 750,000+. How many international students come to study each year in the UK, according to a new report by the Migration Advisory Committee
- 22,300. The number of apprenticeship starts recorded for June 2018, up compared to June 2017 but down compared to June 2016, according to latest stats
- £2.3bn. How much the apprenticeship levy raised over the last year, £400m less than what had been envisaged, according to a question raised in Parliament



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- 31%. How many teachers in primary schools in the UK are aged 30 or under compared to an OECD average of 12%, just one of many statistics in the OECD's latest Education at a Glance 2018 report
- 267,310. How many KS4 students in England entered at least one arts GCSE subject in 2016/17, down 30,000+ since 2010, according to figures quoted in a Parliamentary answer
- 52%. The rise in student suicide rates over the last 18 years, according to a new briefing by the Education Policy Institute
- Almost 30%. How many professional parents claim to know someone who has used 'dubious' tactics to ensure their child gets into a good school, according to new research from the Sutton Trust
- 25%. How many parents surveyed said they'd like daily updates about what their child/children were up to at school, according to a survey by ClassDojo reported in the TES

What to look out for next week

- Launch of Institute for Fiscal Studies report on education spending in England (Monday)
- Publication of Wonkhe 2018 Power list (Monday)
- Lib-Dem Conference (Saturday Sept 15 – Tuesday Sept 18)
- Labour Party Conference (Saturday Sept 22 – Tuesday Sept 25)