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Policy Tracker – Keeping track of what happened in the world of education in August 2019



Main talking points

August is traditionally exam results time and most of the headlines this month have again been taken up with reporting and analysing the latest set. The Johnson government has also been settling in this month and starting to outline its priorities with the new Education Secretary said to be leading on the 3Fs of Funding, Free Schools and FE. Elsewhere, the government has confirmed grading arrangements for T levels, Labour has published an interim report from its Lifelong Learning Commission, university Clearing has been in full swing and PQA (post-qualification admissions) has been much in the news.

Key headlines from the month

- Children's well-being. Children's Society highlights concerns
- School places. Local Government Association expresses concerns about capacity
- Disadvantage gap. The Education Policy Institute points to growing gap at secondary
- GCSE results. Performance slightly up this year with notable changes to some entry trends
- A' level results. Overall pass rates stable though slight drop in proportion of top grades
- Teach First. Launches new web and logo
- Rail Saver. Government launches new savings on rail travel for 16/17 year olds
- T levels. Government issues guidance on grading and UCAS scores
- Devolved budgets. 6 mayoral authorities plus the GLA begin devolved adult ed budgets
- FE Commissioner. Government appoints a new Deputy and two other commissioners
- Lifelong learning. Labour publishes the interim report from its Commission
- National Retraining Scheme. Government announces rollout to other regions
- World Skills 2019. Team UK wins four medals
- Degree apprenticeships. The Office for Students reports on why people choose them
- Office for Students. Government confirms full powers now available to the OfS
- Fast track visas. Government considers plans for leading scientists and researchers
- Admissions system. Labour announce plans to reform and move to a PQA system
- Clearing. UCAS reports record numbers accepted
- 2019 Spending Round. Treasury confirms dept spending announcement early next month

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Reports/Publications of the month (in order of publication)

- **Changes to the way Ofsted inspects.** Ofsted explains in a blog for parents how the new inspection framework, due to operate from this September, is expected to work
- **Education in England: Annual Report 2019.** The Education Policy Institute and Fair Education Alliance highlight a growing disadvantage gap at GCSE in their latest annual report
- **Levelling up: what it really means for school funding.** The Education Policy Institute examines promises by the new PM to level up school funding and finds many in poorer areas might miss out
- **Consultation on changes to the Conditions of Recognition.** Ofqual launches consultation aimed at clarifying the wording on some of the conditions of recognition for exam boards
- **Lifelong Learning Commission.** The Labour Party publishes the interim report from its Lifelong Learning Commission highlighting a number of issues and proposing 4 new working groups
- **Higher education in apprenticeships.** The QAA outlines the common features of higher ed qualifications delivered through apprenticeships in new published guidance
- **Degree Apprenticeships Motivations Research.** The Office for Students publishes commissioned research into why people choose degree apprenticeships with costs and employability key factors
- **Skills Shortages in the UK economy.** The Edge Foundation issues its latest bulletin on UK skills shortages citing evidence from the OU, ONS and LinkedIn and focusing on health and social care
- **Brexit and future student demand.** The HE Policy institute (HEPI) points to conflicting evidence and continuing concerns but suggests that both government and institutions can help ameliorate issues
- **Apprenticeship End Point Assessments 2018-19.** Ofqual reports on its work over the last year in quality assuring standards and end-point assessments in apprenticeships
- **Science research funding in universities.** The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee raises concerns about some of the Augar proposals particularly the impact on future research
- **Working to close the digital divide.** Unionlearn publish a new guide to help union learning reps develop digital skills in respective workplaces
- **Cyber security: a guide for educational providers.** The government updates its guide for education providers on cyber security listing a checklist of steps that are worth observing
- **Labour market outlook.** The CIPD and recruitment agency Adecco report on how employers see the labour market, with confidence remaining strong but concerns about low-skilled recruitment
- **Fight for Free Schools.** Suella Braverman MP, co-founder of the Michaela School, calls on the government to reenergize the Free school programme with changes to funding and approval
- **Discovering Uni.** The Office for Students (OfS) confirms that next month it intends to launch a new comprehensive information website to help prospective students make informed decisions
- **PQA: Just what does it mean?** Nick Hillman, Director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) explains some of the issues and context for post-qualifications admissions in a helpful primer
- **University aspirations.** The Sutton Trust publishes the results of its annual survey of young people about their university aspirations finding uni still valued but knowing the right people also valued
- **A Guide to 2019 A/AS level results for England.** Ofqual offers a full summary of this year's A' level results along with explainers on some of the key features

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- **Variability in A' level results for schools and colleges 2017-2019.** Ofqual provides a subject by subject guide showing that overall things have remained relatively stable
- **Teacher attitude survey report 2019.** Ofsted publishes the results of its latest annual teachers' survey showing a significant drop in teacher opinions of Ofsted itself
- **September spending round.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) sets out ten recommendations for the government to consider including increased funding for 16-19, adult learning and apprenticeships
- **T level action plan: policy update.** The government updates developments around T levels with information on how they will be graded and certificated and what UCAS tariff points they will attract
- **National Retraining Scheme update.** The government announces a further rollout of the scheme initially to two more regions with three more to follow later this year
- **A' level gender gap: attainment and entries 1996 – 2018.** The Education Policy Institute publishes an interactive chart on the A' level gender gap in recent years
- **A' level analysis 2019.** Mary Curnock Cook and Christoffer Fogtdal at Cairneagle Associates report on the key trends and outcomes in this year's A' level results
- **GCSE subjects reveal unfairness faced by disadvantaged pupils.** Teach First reports on a survey that finds pupils who attend schools in England's poorest areas end up with the poorest GCSE results
- **Get a Move On!** The TUC calls on the government to honour its manifesto pledge and introduce discounted bus and train travel for apprentices
- **Summer 2019 GCSE results.** The Joint Council for Qualifications publishes the full set of this summer's GCSE results
- **Guide to GCSE results for England 2019.** Ofqual provides an overall summary of this summer's GCSE results taking in outcomes, grade boundaries and standard setting in various areas
- **Variability in GCSE results for schools and colleges 2017-2019.** Ofqual reports on variability in GCSE results subjects by subject over recent years showing that things have remained stable
- **NRT Annual Statement 2019.** Ofqual reports on this year's National Reference Test with particular reflections on the impact for English Language GCSE but where ultimately no changes were preferred
- **Year 13 results.** The Independent Schools Council reports on the latest exam results among its members noting an increase in the number taking alternative qualifications such as BTECs
- **The exercise of delegated adult education functions.** The government provides guidance to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority on exercising the delegated adult ed functions
- **Youth voice for the future of work.** WorldSkills, the OECD and Education and Employers report on young people's views about the future of work and impact of technology on work generally
- **The Good Childhood Report.** The Children's Society publishes its latest report into children's well-being finding them increasingly unhappy and calling on the government to bring in a national index
- **University governance in a new age of regulation.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) publishes the results of a conversation about university governance and what role they should be expected to play
- **Mapping millennials' living standards.** The Resolution Foundation examines living standards, education attainment and intergenerational progress for the millennial cohort

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Speeches of the month

- Deliberately left blank this month

Quotes of the month

- “I therefore intend to bring forward a new bold and ambitious domestic legislative agenda for the renewal of our country after Brexit” – Boris Johnson sets out future plans for MPs
- “Further education and skills will be a big priority for this government” – the new Education Secretary embraces his joint role as Skills Minister as well
- “A Labour government will deliver the reform that is needed, implementing a new system of post-qualification admissions by the end of our first term in office” – Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner announces Party plans to reform university admissions
- “I have banged on about this a lot but it got drowned out by concern for the HE sector” – Shadow Skills spokesman Gordon Marsden worries about the future of HE provision in FE post Brexit
- “Our vision for the OfS was for it to be a regulator with teeth” – the government confirms the full powers now available to the Office for Students (OfS)
- “I spent the last three years focusing on the end result and now it’s here I don’t know what to do with it” – one graduate on coping with life after leaving university
- “In general, the level of variation in individual school and college results at A* and A’ is similar to previous years” – Ofqual reports on A’ level results
- “The government’s obsession with making exams more rigorous is in danger of destroying their love of learning” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton reflects on the drop in entries in some A’ levels this year notably English
- “We trust schools to make sure that children are well prepared and are supported. So there shouldn’t be that level of stress” – Schools Minister Nick Gibb reacts to suggestions that some pupils had refused to take some GCSE exams this year because the pressures felt too great
- “I am sure we all felt nervous at exam time but the possibility of failure has taken a greater importance than ever before and is deeply worrying our children” – Dame Esther Rantzen, founder of Childline, on the increase in young people seeking counselling around exam time
- “No one will try to terrify you” – Year 8 pupils offer advice to Year 7s about to start secondary school

Word or phrase of the month

- ‘The forgotten third.’ Students who didn’t achieve the standard grade 4 pass in both English and maths GCSE and whose needs have been much under discussion during this month’s exam results.

Steve Besley

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