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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 13 December 2019

(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.

So now we know. The general election result continues to be voluminously scrutinized with the word 'historic' being applied by many. Parliament will resume next week. For the moment, here's the main education stories of the week with an eye on those issues that might face an incoming government.

Higher education first where funding, the Augar review, international collaboration and the TEF continue to hang over the sector. All the major manifestos highlighted access and that was the subject of another briefing this week, in this case from the HE Policy Institute on [access to highly-selective institutions](#), where progress on widening access was described as 'glacially slow.' More contextualized admissions, more diverse provision and more random allocation of places were among the recommendations here. The nature of any new visa system is also an issue worrying HE and this week, Universities UK published the results of a survey highlighting the importance of being able to attract top academics and support staff. Mental health is another issue and this week the student mental health charity Student Minds launched its new University Mental Health Charter, a useful framework of good practice principles

Next FE, where the sector's importance has gradually come to be realized and with it some initial funding. Future 'visioning' was also under discussion at this week's Leadership Trust Symposium. More immediately is the issue of skills training and in particular the future shape of the apprenticeship levy and of technical provision. Further consultation on L3 and below and on L4 and above may set the context for the latter but this week also saw a report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on T level readiness. T levels got little mention during the election campaign but the first ones are due to start next year and previous Ministers have been keen to talk up their potential. This latest report, based on discussions from those in the know a month or so ago, pointed to foundations being in place but some concerns over timescale, progression potential, awareness raising and qualification alignment.

Finally schools, where the report this week of the number of schools in need of repair showed that school funding is likely to remain an issue for an incoming government. Other issues are likely to include performance management, school accountability, teacher workloads, pupil wellbeing and curriculum balance. On the latter, the report this week from the English and Media Centre about the fall in numbers opting for A' level English reminds us that impact of the 'Gove' reforms are likely to face fresh scrutiny. Concerns include how to provide for the so-called forgotten 30%, the group left struggling to secure good passes in core GCSE subjects and secondly, the extent to which the reformed curriculum provides for the skills and capabilities needed for a changing society. Is another review on the cards?



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Top headlines this week

- 'Pupils may have missed more than a week of school because of elections.' ([Monday](#))
- 'T level courses may not be ready by 2020, warns education union.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Parent school donations exacerbating inequality.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Elite universities will need 100 years to hit OfS access goals.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Election 2019: Education big beasts keep their seats.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Election 2019](#). Coverage of results and analysis from the BBC
- [A Year of Impact](#). The employers' organization, the CBI, reported on its media activity and business lobbying over the year pointing to its work around the apprenticeship levy, T level support and immigration policy reform as examples of policy shaping in the skills area
- [21stc Inequalities](#). The United Nations Development Programme highlighted a rise in what it called 'human inequalities' in a major new report pointing to such new factors as climate and technological change which are helping to breed new inequalities even before existing ones have been eradicated
- [Age 31 Sweep](#). UCL's Centre for Longitudinal Studies highlighted its current consultation on the education, training, skills and important life transitions of people born in England between 1989 and 1990, as part of its latest cohort study of a group often dubbed 'Generation Rent'

HE

- [Access to elite universities](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new briefing on access to highly-selective universities indicating that at the current rate of progress, it could take nearly a 100 years to hit the latest targets, calling for more use to be made of random allocation of places and for two versions of degree offers to be used
- [Global talent](#). Universities UK published the results of a new survey showing that most British adults believe that any future immigration system should ensure that scientists, academics and their support staff are able to come and work in the UK
- [Time away](#). The CBI, Santander and the Institute of Student Employers emerged as some of the first employers to offer their support to the campaign being led by Universities UK International, to increase the number of UK undergraduates able to spend some time abroad as part of their degree
- [Mental Health Charter](#). Students Minds published its comprehensive University Mental Health Charter, developed over the course of the year and listing a set of principles built around four domains (Learn, Support, Live, Work) that universities can adopt to help support mental health
- [Student rooms](#). Jim Dickinson reported in Wonkhe on the issue of student housing, now apparently offering all kinds of luxuries in some area but a price and arguably in need of a national strategy
- [Doing our bit](#). The Russell Group of universities outlined a commitment to tackle climate change through research, teaching and more sustainable practices as part of the work of its Environmental Sustainability Network



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FE/Skills

- **Ready or not.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published a follow-up report to its earlier (June 2019) research into how providers are preparing to deliver the first T levels, concluding that most are up to speed but concerned about such areas as T level progression, 'fit' with other qualifications and awareness raising among young people
- **Emerging Jobs.** LinkedIn published its first 'Emerging Jobs Report' for the UK using LinkedIn data to identify emerging jobs and skills with tech roles among the top emerging jobs but with education especially higher education and research featuring strongly
- **A new vision.** Ruth Silver, president of the FE Trust for Leadership (FETL,) set out her thoughts on a new vision for the sector in an article in the TES ahead of a Winter Symposium on the future of FE

Schools

- **KS2 assessments.** The DfE published revised stats for KS2 assessments confirming that 65% of pupils had reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths
- **A level English.** The English and Media Centre reported on its survey among teachers of English indicating a continuing drop in the numbers of students opting to take English A levels, with some blaming the 'new' GCSE in English Language for helping turn large numbers of students off
- **In need of repair.** The Guardian and other media sources reported on a recent survey undertaken by the DfE showing that a large number of schools in England are in need of urgent repair
- **Free schools policy.** The National Education Union (NEU) published figures in the build-up to polling day suggesting that the government had spent large amounts of money opening new types of school that have since struggled or closed

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "There's something funny about how we had state school inspectors before a state school system" - [@nickhassey](#)
- "France is raising the retirement age from 62 to 64" - [@Bloomberg@business](#)
- "One in five UK schools require urgent repairs, investigation finds" - [@SchoolsImprove](#)
- "My children just described having a day off school on Thursday (polling station again) as 'a Christmas miracle'" - [@greenmiranda](#)

Other stories of the week

- **Schools as polling stations.** Should local schools continue to be used as polling stations in the 21stc? It's a question that's frequently asked particularly at the moment when we've had a spate of elections with perhaps more referenda to follow. The Key organization which provides support to head teachers reported this week that over the last four years, some schools had lost as much as a week of education. Suggestions of alternatives have ranged from using churches to modern technology. Either way, as Miranda Green's tweet above indicates, many pupils and perhaps some teachers would be disappointed if their school wasn't used in future. A link to the poll from The Key can be found [here](#)



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- A defining era. Believe it or not but the second decade of the 21stc is drawing to a close. To mark the occasion the New Statesman is launching an A - Z of the 2010's, a homage to the political and cultural trends that have shaped the world over the last decade. The A – Z started with A for Avocados and is building up to be a fascinating list which can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “As soon as the General Election is over, these concerns must be a key priority in the Education Secretary’s in-tray” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton calls on an incoming government to tackle some of the issues around 16-19 education
- “Current progress on fairer access to our most selective universities is glacially slow” – the authors of a new briefing on access to elite universities point to the current lack of progress
- “We need to take the tiller and steer our boat to safer, more abundant waters” – the FE Trust for Leadership (FETL) president, Ruth Silver, charts a new direction for FE
- “Students find it all tedious. Language students are pleasantly surprised when they see that A level is not like GCSE” – English teachers give their views on why take-up for A level English is dropping
- “Punctuation is about two-thirds rules, one-third taste” – language experts reflect on the demise of The Apostrophe Society

Number(s) of the week

- 0.3%. How much the UK economy grew in the latest quarter, July-September 2019, slightly up on the previous quarter, driven largely by the services sector but flat generally, according to latest figures from the ONS
- 87%. How many British adults surveyed believe that the UK’s immigration system should do what it can to attract skilled university staff, according to a survey from Universities UK
- 96. How many years it would take for the Office for Students’ targets for access to highly-selective universities to be met, according to a new policy briefing from the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- 31%. The drop in take-up of A level English subject courses between 2012 and 2019, according to new research from the English and Media Centre
- 68%. How many school leaders said that their staff were spending more of their time than they did last year on Safeguarding, according to NFER’s Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey
- 20%. How many schools are in urgent need of repairs according to a survey reported in The Guardian

What to look out for next week

- New Parliament sworn in (Tuesday)