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



Main talking points

A shorter month but no shortage of activity particularly political. For education, the Chair of Education Committee raised eyebrows with a speech calling for GCSEs to be scrapped in favour of a Bacc at age 18. Contractors to develop the first two T levels were announced and the consultation on funding for T levels closed with the Association of Colleges calling for increased investment for T levels. Contrasting stats were published in HE with uni applications up at the landmark stage of mid-January but salary levels for top staff still raising questions. Finally, monthly economic figures proved positive and the Institute for Fiscal Studies set out the context for the forthcoming Spending Review.

Key headlines from the month

- Baseline assessment. DfE prepares to pilot this September
- Character building. Education Secretary outlines new plan and principles
- Relationship management. Government issues range of new guidance
- MFL. BBC research shows take-up in secondary school at 18 year low
- Bacc again. Education Committee Chair calls for scrapping of GCSEs in favour of a Bacc at age 18
- Teaching profession. NFER publishes new market report
- T levels. Pearson and NCFE win first round of contracts
- AI. Nesta examines the impact of artificial intelligence on schools and colleges
- FE teacher bursary scheme. DfE announces plans to scrap
- T level funding. AoC raises concerns about levels of funding
- T level transition route. DfE advertises for a partner to help develop
- ESOL. Government to publish national strategy this autumn
- Lifelong learning. Labour appoints the members of its new Commission
- HE. Government issues strategic priorities for 2019/20
- Free speech. New guidance issued for universities
- Uni applications 2019. UCAS report record highs in latest data
- Senior staff pay. Office for Students publishes figures for 2017/18
- TEF. Independent review gathers evidence
- Student loan statement. Russell Group and MoneySaving Expert.com propose a clearer version

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

- **Skipping School: Invisible Children.** The Children's Commissioner reports on the growing number of children who are home educated suggesting some may be left vulnerable and exposed
- **Higher education student finance for the 2019/2020 academic year.** The DfE publishes its equality analysis of the latest changes suggesting they should have a marginally positive impact
- **Freedom of Expression.** The Equality and Human Rights Commission along with the HE sector publish new guidance on protecting free speech on university campuses
- **Duty of Care for online service providers.** The Children's Commissioner publishes her proposals for a statutory duty of care as the government prepares to launch its own version next month
- **Devolution of adult education functions.** The DfE publishes Memoranda of Understanding with Mayoral Authorities covering the working arrangements for devolved adult education functions
- **2019 university application figures.** UCAS publishes the latest figures for uni entry this year showing that as of the mid-January deadline, applications were looking buoyant
- **Chief Medical Officers' guidance on screen use.** The UK Chief Medical Officers examine issues around social media and young people and publish a list of guidelines to help parents
- **Strategic College Improvement Fund.** The DfE publishes its commissioned research on the SCIF concluding that it had worked well for most partners and helped support the sharing of good practice
- **Information, Expectations and Transition to Higher Ed.** The NISER report in their Nuffield funded project on how to encourage more disadvantaged students to apply for HE
- **Attitudes towards STEM subjects by gender at KS4.** The DfE publishes commissioned research showing girls still less likely than boys to be taking STEM subjects at A level
- **The outlook for the 2019 Spending Review.** The Institute for Fiscal Studies sets out its thoughts on the economy and what lies ahead as the Chancellor prepares to launch a new Spending Review
- **Strengthening the connection between universities and their places.** The UPP Foundation publishes its Civic Commission report as 30+ universities affirm their links with their community
- **A Sustainable Future for Journalism.** The Cairncross Review publishes its report on the future of sustainable journalism calling for innovation funding, a new code of conduct and media literacy
- **Senior staff remuneration.** The Office for Students publishes data and analysis of senior staff pay for 2017/18 showing only a few signs of pay restraint but pledging continuing transparency in the future
- **Working Class Heroes.** The National Education Opportunities Network highlights low participation rates in high tariff universities by white working class students and calls for a national strategy
- **Annual Qualification Market Report.** Ofqual publishes the annual report for 2017/18 showing the number and types of qualification available for 2017/18 and how many certificates were issued
- **A Vision for the National Retraining Scheme.** The Centre for Social Justice think tank sets out its views on national retraining calling for a new lead body and personal learner accounts
- **Homes Fit for Study.** The National Union of Students reports on the sometimes dire living conditions facing many students living in privately rented accommodation
- **Brexit and issues facing children.** The UK's four Children's Commissioners call on the government to ensure that matters such as child protection and staff vetting are tackled under Brexit arrangements

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- **Living Standards Outlook.** The Resolution Foundation publishes its latest report on living standards suggesting that things continue to look challenging for low and middle income families
- **Preparing the New Generation for the World of Work.** The World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) finds many young people in Europe concerned about being poorly prepared for future work
- **Closing the regional attainment gap.** The All Party Parliamentary Group looking at social mobility worries about cold spots and calls for greater support and incentives to help close the gap
- **The Future of the TEF.** Universities UK publish their response to the independent enquiry looking into the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) recommending a number of improvements
- **Teacher Labour Market in England.** The NFER reports on the teacher labour market highlighting concerns about stress, working conditions and shortages in some secondary subjects
- **Educ-AI-tion Rebooted?** The global innovation foundation NESTA explore the future role of artificial intelligence in schools and colleges highlighting three key areas of activity
- **Moderation and verification of centre assessment judgements.** Ofqual launches consultation designed to clarify and tighten up centre assessment procedures
- **Managing relationships.** The government reports on its response to its earlier consultation and issues new guidance for schools in England on relationship, sex and health education
- **Reception Baseline Assessment.** The government publishes the framework for the proposed reception stage assessment due to be piloted this autumn and introduced the autumn after
- **Keeping kids safe.** The Children's Commissioner reports on the growing numbers of children joining gangs, some of the reasons why and what might be done to help tackle the problem
- **Review of the Level 4-5 qualification and provider market.** The DfE publishes its commissioned report revealing the size and extent of the L 4/5 market and range of qualifications available
- **Access and participation plans.** The Office for Students announces a new evaluation centre and publishes its latest guidance for providers as they draw up access and participation plans for 2020/21
- **A Qualified Success.** The think tank Policy Exchange considers past efforts to reform post-16 vocational education and put forward a number of recommendations to make T levels a success

Speeches of the month

- Universities Minister Chris Skidmore's **11 February UPP Foundation Civic University Commission report speech** highlights the importance of universities working closely with their communities
- Education Committee Chair Rob Halfon's **11 February Edge Foundation speech** re-enters the Bacc fray with a call for an end to GCSEs in favour of a broader Bacc at age 18
- Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner's **16 February UCU annual conference speech** spells out a number of radical changes Labour is considering for reforming the higher education market
- Jeremy Corbyn's 19 February **Make UK Conference speech** promises a more active industrial strategy with greater investment, skills development and lifelong learning
- Universities Minister Chris Skidmore's **28 February Nottingham Trent speech** lists five steps to help improve access and participation and move things up a gear

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Quotes of the month

- “I’m very keen to make sure that I’m not the Minister who shoots from the hip” – the University Minister explains his style in an interview with the Times Higher
- “In this time of uncertainty, it’s welcome news to see more EU and international students wanting to come and study in the UK” – the UCAS boss on the latest vibrant uni entry figures
- “If politicians fan the flames of fear about the cost of university, they could end up deterring the very people who could benefit most from university”- CBI Director-General Carolyn Fairbairn warns against upheaval of the tuition fee system
- “We have to end the outdated grammar school mentality of looking down on someone who does a vocational courses and looking up to someone who does an academic course” – Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn offers his support for parity of esteem
- “Over the last 10 years, FE has been the Cinderella of education spending” – MPs from all sides sign up to a letter to the Chancellor calling for more FE funding under the forthcoming Spending Review
- “Colleges have serious concerns about their viability based on current funding levels” – the Association of Colleges (AoC) raises concerns about the funding of T levels
- “We must take the opportunity to fundamental reimagine this phase of education turning the high-stakes GCSEs that drive so much perverse behaviour in the system into a simple data-led progress check at 18” – Education Committee Chair Rob Halfon on scrapping GCSEs in favour of a Bacc
- “With autonomy comes greater accountability and transparency which is exactly why I am insistent that the salaries of their executives are justifiable” – the Schools Minister calls out high pay among some Academy Trusts
- “I had a student tell me she wanted to be a social influencer on Instagram. How do we as teachers prepare her for that?” – teachers recount the challenges they face in helping prepare young people for an uncertain world of work

Word or phrase of the month

- ‘GPT-2.’ Apparently an AI tool that can predict the next word from a given piece of text. Enthusiasm appears mixed

Steve Besley

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