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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 8 February 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.

An interesting statistic to start this week.

In Ipsos Mori's latest [Issues Index](#), the Index that looks at what's worrying people in Britain today, education has moved up to third place in the listing of people's concerns, behind Brexit and the NHS but just ahead of inequality, immigration, housing, law and order and the economy. It's a timely reminder of the value people attach to education when the B word and so many other issues seem to be hogging the headlines.

In terms of education headlines, many this week have been about social media and its effects on young people, triggered perhaps by this week's latest Children's Mental Health Week and annual Safer Internet Day. The government is due to present a White Paper on the matter next month but in the interim we've had important reports this week from the [Children's Commissioner](#) and [UK Chief Medical Officers](#) among others. There seems little agreement yet on what the research tells us or how regulation might work yet most are agreed that something needs to be done.

Over in higher education, UCAS [published](#) the latest buoyant figures for uni applications so far this year, the Universities Minister was [interviewed](#) by the Times Higher where he had some interesting things to say about whether too many people were going to uni (they're not,) while the FT published a fascinating [Big Read](#) on the challenges currently facing UK higher ed. It provoked some interesting responses, some more radical than others and the whole thing, the paper and the responses, are worth reading.

In FE, the government [announced](#) the scrapping of the FE teacher bursary scheme and [issued](#) MoUs for the devolution of adult ed functions while concerns continued to be expressed in the sector about when the new [Functional Skills](#) would be available and some of the issues still to be resolved in [T levels](#).

For schools, the Education Minister continued his foray into [character education](#), spelling out his five core ingredients and announcing an advisory group to draw up details, though talk of guidance benchmarks may worry some. The Schools Minister [reminded](#) Academy Trusts of the need to show restraint on top levels of pay, the Children's Commissioner issued a [report](#) on the growing numbers of home educated children and the Education Committee held its latest [witness session](#), this time with Ofsted. Finally, MPs are preparing to debate early next week, although perhaps not too early, whether schools should allow for a later start in the day so that teenagers can be more on the ball.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Hinds admits concerns about effects of social media on his children.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Concern over delay of reformed functional skills.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Student exchanges in no-deal Brexit threat.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Proportion of pupils applying to uni hits new high.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Pupils face £2 'fines' to get their phones back.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Inequality in the 21st c.](#) The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) announced a major new project funded by the Nuffield Foundation and chaired by Nobel Professor Sir Angus Deaton, that will examine inequality in the 21st century from many different perspectives, including that of education, and the extent to which things may or may not be changing for different groups and regions
- [Thirtysomethings feel the pinch.](#) The Resolution Foundation published its latest Earnings Outlook showing pay over the last year starting to pick up from the financial crisis with growth set to continue during 2019 but with those in their 30s on average still some way behind pre-crisis levels
- [Local government spending.](#) The Public Accounts Committee published its latest report into local government spending, noting the cuts in recent years and calling again on the government to come up with clear plans to ensure services are properly costed and provided for in the future
- [Leading on wellbeing.](#) The FT reported that the New Zealand government was preparing to present in May, the world's first 'wellbeing budget,' built around five priorities with one focused on the needs of those aged under 24

HE

- [Latest application figures.](#) UCAS published the figures for applications to UK HE as of Jan 15, one of the key staging points in the process, showing an unheralded increase in the total number of applications received with a record number of 18 yr olds in England applying and an increase in both EU and non EU applicants
- [Freedom of speech.](#) The Equality and Human Rights Commission in conjunction with leading HE bodies published new guidance on the application of free speech on university campuses, confirming that universities have a legal requirement to protect it and should be aiming to widen rather than narrow debate
- [How much?](#) The DfE published its equality analysis of the latest changes to student finances which will see maximum loans and grants increased by forecast inflation for the 2019/20 academic year, concluding that these are likely to have 'a marginally positive impact' for most students
- [The Minister speaks to the THES.](#) The (newish) Universities Minister indicated that he was against introducing a grades threshold for university entry as had been rumoured under the post -18 review and didn't believe that there were too many people going to uni, in an interesting interview with the THES



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- **Survival of the fittest.** The FT reported on UK higher education and the range of challenges it faces in a detailed comment piece, concluding that these are difficult times for the sector
- **Augar warnings.** The MillionPlus group of Modern Universities highlighted its concerns about some of the policies thought to be under consideration by the Augar Review looking into post-18 education
- **Made in Cambridge.** The financier David Harding announced that he was making one of the largest donations in modern times to Cambridge University, his alma mater, with a large chunk of the promised £100m to be used to support PhD students but also some to be used to support widening access
- **Toronto calls.** BBC education correspondent Sean Coughlan reported on moves being taken by the University of Toronto to recruit international students, notably those that might previously have considered either the US or UK but who are now fueling student growth in Canada
- **Who knows best?** Dr Scott Kelly tackled the issue of who's best to determine which subjects students should study, in a new blog on the growing HE Policy Institute website, arguing that politicians and bureaucrats don't always know best

FE/Skills

- **MoU on devolved adult ed.** The DfE published Memoranda of Understanding with the Mayoral Authorities and Greater London on working arrangements for devolved adult education budgets later this year including the management of funds, providers, risks and protections for learners
- **No more bursaries.** The government announced it was scrapping the FE teacher bursary scheme after this academic year, claiming it was investing up to £20m in new programmes including training for T levels
- **Time for TEP.** Tom Bewick, chief exec of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, argued in a new blog in FE Week for the creation of new independent bodies, Technical Education Partnerships, that could bring together employers and awarding organisations to lead T level system developments
- **High Five.** Joe Dromey, deputy director at the Learning and Work Institute, listed in a comment piece for the TES, five core issues around T levels that need tackling for them to be successful, including availability, high-quality placements and qualification fit

Schools

- **All about character.** The Education Secretary set out his thoughts on character education in a major speech, identifying what he considered to be the five core components and announcing the creation of an advisory group to help draw up proposals
- **Children's Mental Health Week.** The Education Secretary announced a series of activities for use in schools including relaxation techniques and trials of specialized assessment of young people entering care, as part of Children's Mental Health Week
- **Home educated.** The Children's Commissioner published a report to go with Channel 4's Dispatches programme looking at home education and suggesting that while some home schooling may be through personal choice, a lot of it is less clear, leaving some children vulnerable and with less access to appropriate resources, monitoring and support



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- **Tackling disadvantage in Early Years.** The House of Commons Education Committee published its report into tackling disadvantage in early years provision criticizing the government for having no clear strategy and arguing that its current childcare policy entrenched rather than improved inequality
- **Pay restraint.** The Schools Minister wrote to a number of Academy Trusts asking them to explain cases of high salaries and calling on them to remember the need to act 'responsibly' when it comes to top pay
- **Chief Medical Officers' advice.** The UK Chief Medical Officers offered their thoughts about the impact of screen use on children suggesting that more research is need to assess any causal relationship with mental health but calling on all parties to develop ground rules and outlining some helpful tips for parents in the interim
- **Online safety.** Global Kids Online reported on its recent survey about children's experiences online indicating that it can be a positive experience for many and that encouraging children to use the internet positively rather than banning them from it tends to work better
- **Online Duty of Care.** The Children's Commissioner published some draft proposals for a statutory duty of care for online service providers as the government prepares to publish its own proposals next month
- **More of a lie-in.** The petition calling for schools to start later in the morning to accommodate the different body clocks of teenagers reached the requisite number for a formal debate on the matter to be held in Parliament

Tweets(s) of the week

- 'When the school leadership won't carry out their behaviour policy, but they will stick a creme egg in your pigeonhole to 'boost morale' -@tombennett71
- 'The only place where there hasn't been a collapse in the numbers of mature students is University Challenge' -@smitajamdar
- 'I see we've reached the "character building and resilience" stage in the lifecycle of an education secretary' -@RichardA
- 'On the value of boredom: "it isn't actually the teacher's job to entertain as well as educate. Life isn't meant to be an endless parade of amusements' - @C_Hendrick
- 'Power of tech in school. Just observing an A-level History lesson. One of our pupils is contagious and at home but face-timed in and is contributing fully. Materials on google classroom and she is completing everything' - @edvainer
- 'Jeez... "Today, 63 per cent of single adults between the ages of 20 and 29 live with their parents, as do just over half of 25- to 29-year-olds" -@pollycurtis

Other stories of the week

- Six tips for communicating with your teenager. The focus for much of this week has been on children, young people and their wellbeing. As part of its contribution, the Children's Society posted its six tips for communicating with teenagers listed in its report last year on Good Childhood. They include: 'try to have a sit down meal or coffee a few times a week to chat' and 'don't belittle their worries.' For those keen for help, a link to the list is [here](#)



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- A shorter working week. The concept of a shorter working work and its impact on productivity, employee wellbeing and social welfare, is it seems back in vogue. Radio 4 is running a series on it, the Labour Party has a Commission looking at it and some countries are trialling it. For many people it solves so many problems from transport congestion, to child care, to worker productivity, and technology of course can help make all this a reality. Or can it? This week the New Statesman looked at the benefits of a shorter working week in a Leader article [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “This isn’t woolly but a well-rounded economic approach - the same kind we will use to confront the challenges posed by climate change, digital transformation, social exclusion, poor health, housing and domestic violence” – The PM of New Zealand announces that her country will present the world’s first wellbeing budget in a couple of months’ time
- “Academics who can talk to non-academics are like hen’s teeth. They get asked back” Public First Director Jonathan Simons on how to engage with government policy makers
- “I’m a Universities Minister who believes that there aren’t too many people at university” – the University Minister tells the Times Higher where he stands on the numbers issue
- “I believe he is a scholar of Tudor England, which I suspect will serve him well considering how long higher education Ministers last in this Government—it is about the same as Henry VIII’s wives” – the Shadow Education Secretary barbs with the newish Universities Minister
- “They have over-expanded and there will be a slimming down” – Sir Anthony Seldon talks high noon for UK universities as challenges mount
- “Everyone has the right to express and receive views and opinions, including those that may offend, shock or disturb others” – the EHRC issues new guidance of freedom of speech in universities
- “The secretary of state is very aware because I have not ceased to point it out to him the challenges FE faces” – the Skills Minister responds to MPs calling on the government to do more to fund FE
- “When I compare you and your peers to who I was at your age, my class mates and I, you have so much more confidence, ambition and gumption than we ever did” – the Education Secretary praises the character and strength of today’s young people
- “Leave phones outside the bedroom when it is bedtime” – UK Chief Medical Officers offer advice for parents on social media use

Number(s) of the week

- 561,420. How many people have applied to start a course in UK higher ed this year, the first increase in three years according to latest figures from UCAS
- 38.8%. The proportion of 18 yr olds in England applying for a higher ed course this year, a record according to latest figures from UCAS
- 7%. How much average earnings for 30 yr olds is still down from its pre-crisis peak according to latest figures from the Resolution Foundation
- Every 2 hours. How often children should be encouraged to take a break from their screens, according to UK Medical Chief Officers



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- 60,000. How many children are estimated as being home educated in England last year, according to figures compiled by the Children's Commissioner

What to look out for next week

- IfS/IfG briefing on this year's Spring statement and Spending Review (Monday)
- Education Committee witness session on SEND (Tuesday)
- Institute of Education 'What if' session on school autonomy and regulation (Wednesday)