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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 22 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.

No Policy Watch last week so two weeks of news to catch up on.

Last week first, where four questions, which collectively seem to be shaping educational priorities for 2019, stand out. They include first, what sort of learning/curriculum young people need for the 21st c, raised in Rob Halfon's 'Bakers not Butchers' speech at the Edge Foundation which questioned among other things the continued need for GCSEs. The speech, available [here](#), has had some follow-up but in fairness was intended to trigger extended debate on a topic that regularly resurfaces. Second, what kind of higher education system we want, market driven, competitive or according to an important report last week, community based. 'Place' remains an important concept in education provision and has been recognised as such by the number of universities prepared to sign Civic Agreements. The report can be found [here](#).

Third, what level of investment is needed for public services such as education in the future? We already know what has been lined up for the NHS, other areas like education have to await the outcomes of this year's Spending Review. There's pressure across the education system for increased investment especially in the college sector as their letter to the Chancellor indicated. Last week's briefing Paper available [here](#), from the Institute for Fiscal Studies provides a useful scene setter on the Spending Review. And fourth, how best to manage information flows and social media access for young people where last week's [Cairncross Review](#) offered some thoughts. Ministers are in Silicon Valley this week discussing regulation.

And so to this week where Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn [outlined](#) plans for what he called 'an active industrial strategy' with planned investment in infrastructure, support for skills development and a Commission on lifelong learning. Also this week, the Shadow Education Secretary [outlined](#) her thoughts on reforming the higher education system, the HE Policy Institute [reported](#) on tuition fee policies over the years, the BBC [wondered](#) if universities would go bust if fees were cut and the National Union of Students [reported](#) on the dire living conditions faced by many students in privately rented accommodation: '18 days with no hot water,' according to one.

In FE and skills, the Association of Colleges [called](#) for an increase in the funding rate for T levels, the Centre for Social Justice [outlined](#) proposals for a National Training Scheme while the manufacturer's organisation, the EEF, [re-branded](#) itself as Make UK. Finally for schools, many of which have been on half term this week, the government [announced](#) support for some free early learning apps, the unions kept up the [pressure](#) on teacher's pay and MPs [reported](#) on closing the regional attainment gap.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Three top-paying universities cut vice-chancellor salaries.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Labour reveals lifelong learning commission panel.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'AoC: T levels will operate at a loss without more funding.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'No point teaching coding says PISA chief.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Could changes in university funding limit student places?' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Labour plans](#). Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn outlined Labour plans for a reinvigorated industrial strategy incorporating a renaissance in manufacturing, greater investment in infrastructure, a commission on lifelong learning and a commitment to skills development and parity of esteem between qualifications
- [Disinformation and fake news](#). The Commons' Digital, Culture and Media Committee published the final report from its extensive inquiry into disinformation and fake news, pointing the finger at some big tech companies notably Facebook and calling for a compulsory Code of Ethics, a levy and stronger regulation generally
- [Brexit and children](#). The four UK Children's Commissioners wrote to the government calling for assurances that matters such as child protection, family law matters and staff vetting will be considered as important priorities in the Brexit arrangements
- [Balancing the books](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) commented on the latest public finance figures which showed a potential welcome drop in borrowing but counterbalanced against a downgrade for growth, all providing an uncertain picture for the Chancellor's forthcoming Spring Statement
- [Labour Market outlook](#). The CIPD and Adecco Group published their latest assessment of the labour market pointing to improvements in pay although only for the private sector but with continuing skill shortages in a number of sectors
- [Living Standards Outlook](#). The Resolution Foundation published its latest report into living standards suggesting that the outlook for low and middle income families continues to look challenging with income growth minimal for many groups and child poverty set to rise
- [Council funding worries](#). Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, spelt out the funding challenges facing many local councils as council taxes rise, the pressure on social care grows and the Fair Funding Review looms
- [Open for business](#). The Centre for Cities think tank in conjunction with George Capital reported on how to stimulate city centres suggesting that the most successful are those that shift away from relying on more retail outlets to developing knowledge-based jobs and leisure services, calling for more investment in such skills that can help High Streets thrive
- [More on AI](#). The Oxford Student think tank, OxPolicy, offered their thoughts on the emergence of artificial intelligence and its likely impact on the labour market, concluding like many that this is as yet unclear and likely to vary by sector, and calling on government to set up an AI Tsar and employers to undertake more skills training to prepare people for a different future



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- **Reforming the market.** Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner outlined plans for reforming higher education in a speech at the University and Colleges Union annual conference, calling for an end to what she called 'the failed free market in higher education' and proposing a different role for the regulator with powers to intervene on pay and academic diversity and on preventing financial collapse
- **To cut or not?** The Russell Group of Universities along with leading social mobility charities called on the government to make up any funding shortfall and ensure no cap on numbers is introduced if the post-18 review, due to report shortly, recommends as has been rumoured a cut in tuition fee levels
- **Fees or bust?** BBC Education correspondent Sean Coughlan investigated the case for a possible tuition fee cut, said to be under consideration by the current post-18 review, highlighting the challenges this could cause some, particularly more vulnerable, institutions
- **Feeling confused on fees.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) examined how political positions on tuition fees had changed in recent years noting that perversely, lower fees don't always win votes
- **Top salaries.** The FT reported that three universities were cutting the salary levels of their vice-chancellors as debate continued in the wake of the recent Office for Students report on which universities were paying what in terms of top salaries
- **Snobby about tech ed.** The Education Guardian continued its series of discussions with University VCs comparing and contrasting on this occasion different attitudes both here and abroad towards technical education
- **Bad housing.** The National Union of Students reported on the sometimes appalling state of privately rented housing that many students have to endure suggesting that over 40% live in 'hazardous' properties
- **Shulaw.** Sheffield Hallam University became the first university to create its own law firm with the help of two solicitors that will work there full time and help provide students with real life work experience when the centre opens next week

FE/Skills

- **Lifelong Learning Commission.** The Labour Party revealed the names of its Lifelong Learning Commission, first proposed last year and intended to sketch out a future model of lifelong learning that would form part of the Party's overall National Education Service
- **Funding T levels.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) raised concerns about the costs involved in delivering new T levels especially resource heavy ones like engineering, construction and science, calling on the government to raise the per student base rate by at least £1000
- **National Retraining.** The Centre for Social Justice think tank published the third in its series of reports in its Future of Work Programme focusing in this instance on a National Retraining Scheme and calling among other things for a new body to lead such a scheme, more money for FE, a new system of Personal Learner Accounts and a focus on low-skilled, out of work individuals
- **Make UK.** EEF, the body that represents manufacturers took the opportunity at its National Conference to re-launch itself with a new name, Make UK, and new identity as it prepared to face a 'unique' range of challenges and opportunities in the years ahead
- **Not there yet.** David Hughes, chief exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC) reported on the current state of adult learning in the UK following last week's report on adult learning systems by the OECD,



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arguing that while the building blocks were in place in the UK, there were still a number of aspects such as investment, participation, responsiveness, that needed improving on in the UK

Schools

- **No cap needed.** Teacher Unions wrote to the Teachers' Pay Review Body urging it to ignore the government's preferred cap of 2% and to consider instead its claim for 5%
- **Closing the regional attainment gap.** The All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs looking into social mobility issued a new report raising concerns about possible social mobility cold spots and calling for the Pupil Premium to be redesignated as the Social Mobility Premium, for greater incentives to help schools work together and for more support for teachers working in challenging areas
- **Free early learning apps.** The DfE announced that it will help disadvantaged families in particular with advice, guidance and some free to use apps that can be used to help children's early language and literacy as part of an initiative to help boost reading at home
- **Future world of work.** The global platform World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) reported on its survey of young people in Europe and the UK about the future world of work, finding most optimistic but many feeling that their education system prepared them poorly for the world of work and calling particularly for more work experience
- **Take 4.** A school student wrote a commentary piece for the TES about the recent suggestion to scrap GCSEs, arguing that rather than scrapping them, GCSEs should be improved, and listing four ways, including letting students decide which Paper to take, foundation or higher, this might happen
- **Finishing the Gove revolution.** Mark Lehain, Director of Parents and Teachers for Excellence, argued in a comment piece on the conservativehome page, that a further wave of challenges need to be tackled including full academisation, equitable funding and a clear focus on pupil behaviour, to reap the benefits of the 'Gove' reforms
- **Character defining.** Education commentator Laura McNerney reflected on the nature of character education in the light of a recent speech on the matter by the Education Secretary, arguing that for many young people, life itself can be character shaping
- **Making PBL work.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published further research evidence from its commissioned work into project based learning (PBL) in UTCs outlining the challenges and best practice involved

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Nobel Prize Winner @sirfrasersays says young scientists should take heart if they are yet to make their big discovery; "It was 20 years and 20,000 hours of research before things really took off". Fortunately he enjoyed the entire process!" - [@DrEmmaLJohnston](#)
- "Over last 10 days, in 6 separate discussions, 6 heads of maths have told me of their despair at being forced to move to mixed ability teaching. We need to have a very serious national discussion about the quality/intellect of people we put in positions of influence over teachers" - [@EmathsUK](#)
- "Female teachers are breaking the glass ceiling only to find a conservatory outside" - [@schoolsontap](#)
- "The v-c of @cardiffuni has warned that more leading UK universities will be forced to make significant job cuts if undergraduate tuition fees remain frozen" - [@timeshighered](#)



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- “Same old people again and again on the radio and the telly when it comes to talking about school issues. There are other people with different viewpoints you know” - [@smithsmm](#)
- “Today, so far, I’ve had a bubble bath, read a self-help book, watched a documentary, done some gardening and some autobiographical writing. I reckon if I chuck in yoga and baking I’ve pretty much covered all middle aged holiday pursuits on day 1 of half term. Smashing it” - [@MrsSpalding](#)

Other stories of the week

- We didn’t see this coming. Each year, Bill and Melinda Gates publish a letter outlining what they’ve learnt/discovered over the last year. It’s a little bit like a corporate report but with a difference in that it’s very personal and focuses on areas where the Gates Foundation is hoping to make a difference. Last week, the Gates’ published their latest letter looking back at 2018 and identifying nine things from data use, to climate change to the changing role of textbooks that they learned last year. A link to the letter can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “It makes no sense for people to only be educated for the first quarter of their life and then work for the rest of their days with outdated or insufficient qualifications” – Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn announces a new Lifelong Learning Commission
- “The Office for Students has issued one short term loan (£900,000) to one higher education provider, which has been repaid in full” – the Universities Minister responds to a question in Parliament about how often the Office for Students has had to bail out an higher ed institution in England
- “Like much of our establishment, our universities are too male, pale and stale and do not represent the communities that they serve and modern Britain” – Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner explains the thinking behind Labour Party plans for reforming higher education
- “Living in damp and dangerous properties is not a rite of passage for students coming to college or university” – the NUS reports on the poor state of student rented accommodation
- “As it stands, even if every place is filled on specialist courses such as engineering, construction and science, they will be operating at a significant loss” – the Association of Colleges calls for an increased funding rate for T levels
- “It is becoming impossible for colleges to attract and keep the skilled staff they need, particularly in areas such as engineering and construction” – the CEO of York College adds her voice to the funding issues in FE in a letter to the Observer
- “A 2% pay increase would be grossly inadequate and any pay award must be fully funded by the government” – teacher unions write to the Pay Review Body urging it to ignore the government’s 2% cap

Number(s) of the week

- 20:1. What the pay ratio between the highest and lowest paid university staff should be, according to the Labour Party



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- 2%. The median expected pay increase for 2019 according to the latest market report from the CIPD/Adecco Group
- 42%. How many students live in privately rented property full of damp and mould, according to a survey from the National Union of Students
- 33%. How many parents feel confident in helping their children with their homework, according to research from Oxford Home Schooling
- 75. How many minutes of break time a day schools should be providing to ensure health and wellbeing among its pupils with many providing less than that, according to MPs

What to look out for next week

- MPs debate on education spending plans (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session with Andreas Schleicher on the role of technology in the classroom (Tuesday)
- Whole Education Annual conference (Tuesday)
- NESTA Conference on Shaping the Education System for the Future (Thursday)