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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 18 January 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.

It's been some week of course, but for education the big news of the week has been the launch from Ofsted of its long-awaited proposals for a [new inspection framework](#). In launching it, the Chief Inspector singled out two defining words, 'substance and integrity,' intended to set the focus if not the tone of the proposals.

Elsewhere this week, the Commons Education Committee [held](#) the Education Secretary to account and continued its Inquiry into [Special Educational Needs](#). In higher education, two interesting reports were published, stories continued to circulate about what might come out of the forthcoming post-18 review, and one university announced a [3-day digital detox](#) to help student well-being. On the skills front, the government launched its new [apprenticeship campaign](#), the Skills Minister addressed the Sixth Form Colleges Association Winter Conference and providers were [invited to apply](#) for the next wave of T level provision due to start in 2021, while for schools [tiered GCSEs](#) and [mobile phones](#) have both been among the topics in the news this week.

But back to the main story and Ofsted's proposed new inspection framework. At the heart of the proposals, which have been in gestation for some time, is a renewed emphasis on the curriculum, something that Ofsted believes has been missing in action from inspections for some time. The curriculum provides the heart beat for so much important activity in schools and colleges and Ofsted is keen to restore it to its central place. That's not to say outcomes don't matter or that there's a special Ofsted style model curriculum rather than this is a classic area where those key words 'substance' and 'integrity' need to apply.

Quality of education, the umbrella term for the curriculum, therefore becomes one of the new measures in the new four-point scale along with the previous leadership and management and the two now separated measures of personal development, and behaviour and attitudes respectively. The thinking behind all of these can be found in the accompanying [research](#) commentary which many will find useful as they consider their response over the coming weeks and which Ofsted claims help make this the 'most evidence-based, research-informed and tested framework in its 26 year history.'

Reactions to the proposals have been pretty much as Ofsted might have expected. For schools, ASCL's [Geoff Barton](#) saw them as 'a step in the right direction' though he detected a continuing 'finger-wagging' tone on matters such as KS3, off-rolling and workloads, and challenged the continued emphasis on the EBacc. For colleges, the [AoC](#) equally welcomed aspects such as the renewed emphasis on the curriculum but had continuing queries about for example the experience of inspectors in dealing with some sector work-based activity and the nature of multi-site reporting. The consultation remains open until 5 April 2019.



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Top headlines this week

- 'UCAS-style portal for FE courses to launch.' ([Monday](#))
- 'University switches off social media to help student well-being.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Ofsted plans overhaul of inspections to look beyond exam results.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'London state schools secures 41 Oxbridge offers.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Ofsted and DfE staff nabbed for Brexit planning.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [PM's statement](#). The Prime Minister made a Statement to Parliament following the Vote of No Confidence indicating how she intended to take things forward
- [Employment trends](#). The Resolution Foundation reported on employment trends over the last decade since the global financial crisis, pointing to a decade of employment growth but noting that some of this has come at the cost of job quality and younger people have fared less well in many areas

HE

- [PQA latest](#). The National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) and UCU published a new report on the university admissions system, revisiting the case for a post-qualification application (PQA) system as part of a wider 3-stage admissions process which would see applications submitted in early August and the new Year 1 beginning in November
- [Post-18 review latest](#). The FT reported on the latest rumours coming out of the post-18 review suggesting that the current fee level might remain after all although the proportion paid through loans could vary
- [More post-18 review rumours](#). The Guardian examined the potential impact of another issue said to be under consideration by the post 18 review, that of restricting university entry to those gaining 3 D grades and above, suggesting that if adopted, this would leave many disadvantaged students out in the cold and hit many universities as well
- [Escape of the wealthy](#). The Intergenerational Foundation examined some of the inequalities in the current tuition fee system highlighting that by being able to pay fees upfront, wealthier students were able to avoid some of the more punitive aspects such as heavy interest charges and future pay packet deductions
- [Student debt](#). The FT reported on comments made by the governor of the Bank of England at the latest Treasury Committee hearing in which he confirmed that the Bank was looking into student debt and its impact on future UK financial stability
- [Disabled students](#). The Universities Minister announced a roundtable of key players to look at how best to support the growing numbers of disabled students entering higher education and what more could be done to help



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- **Joint declaration.** Leaders from the Russell Group and German U15 group of research intensive universities signed a new joint declaration committing to work together on leading research and innovation post-Brexit and calling on respective governments to help facilitate this
- **Be prepared.** Tony Strike, university secretary at the University of Sheffield, outlined how universities were hoping for the best but planning for the worst as they faced the twin challenges of the post-18 review and Brexit with no national body to guide them
- **A view from the inside.** Roger Mosey, Master at Selwyn College Cambridge, explained how the Cambridge admissions process worked and how, despite views to the contrary, a lot of reliance was placed on contextual data to help generate a broader picture of candidates

FE/Skills

- **Expressions of interest for 2021 T levels.** The DfE invited expressions of interest from providers interested in offering the next wave of T levels from 2021 which will cover ten pathways in areas including digital, construction, education and childcare, and health and science
- **FE inspections.** Ofsted issued consultation on its new inspection framework along with a draft handbook outlining the forms of evidence it was likely to seek under each of the new four inspection categories, to be used in inspections from Sept 2019
- **Fire it up.** The government launched its latest campaign to help promote apprenticeships under a 'Fire it up' logo, with a range of national and social media adverts, a new website providing advice, guidance and information, and a big push around the benefits and importance of apprenticeships generally
- **Funding Centre of Excellence.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) announced the appointment of a new Director of Funding who will lead the creation and operation of a new post-16 funding Centre for Excellence
- **Stronger together.** David Hughes, chief exec of the Association of Colleges (AoC) wrote a comment piece for the TES ahead of this year's major Spending Review calling on universities to work with colleges on campaigning together for a better deal for post-18 education
- **Opportunity pass.** Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester, announced the launch of an Opportunity Pass as part of a new strategy for the region that would allow for free bus travel and an online careers platform for 16-18 year olds
- **New protocol.** The Collab Group announced that it had secured a new partnership with the recruitment agency Protocol with the aim of ensuring a more tailored service for members

Schools

- **New inspection framework.** Ofqual launched its proposals for school inspections from this September along with accompanying commentary and research with consultation remaining open until April 5 2019
- **Explaining the new framework.** Ofsted Chief inspector Amanda Spielman outlined the proposed new inspection framework and the thinking behind it in a speech to the Sixth Form Colleges Conference
- **Tiered GCSEs.** Ofqual wrote to schools to clarify the arrangements for grading higher tier combined science and MFL GCSEs this summer, calling on them to exercise caution when deciding whether to enter borderline candidates at higher tiers



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- **Agency fees.** The Education Secretary launched a new online tool listing agency fees charges to help schools compare and keep costs to a minimum when using agencies to recruit staff
- **Chief Adjudicator's report.** The Office of the Schools Adjudicator which reports on admissions arrangements for schools in England, published its latest annual report covering 2017/18 admissions, broadly giving the system a thumbs-up although noting that some families still face difficulties
- **Early Years Workforce.** The Education Policy Institute reported on the latest survey of the early years workforce in England highlighting issues of low pay, lack of diversity and poor levels of qualification in some areas
- **Selective schooling.** Bath University's Institute for Policy Research added its voice to the debate about the role of grammar schools in supporting HE entry by disadvantaged pupils, triggered by a recent report from the HE Policy Institute (HEPI,) questioning how some of the data had been interpreted
- **Mobile phones in exams.** Ofqual published a new blog reminding students not to take mobile phones into exams, even if they are very attached to them (the phones, not the exams)
- **Cyber First.** The National Cyber Security Centre reported that it had tripled its intake over the last three years in courses for young people to develop cyber-security skills and was now working on encouraging more teenage girls in particular to take up courses

Tweets(s) of the week

- “@DamianHinds says he will put 'a very strong and very compelling case for education' in run-up to spending review” -@tesfeneews
- “There isn't and won't be an Ofsted curriculum...an excellent curriculum can be constructed in many different ways #EIF2019” -@Ofstednews
- “Dear Ridley Scott, Please remake Black Hawk Down as Blackboard Down, the gripping tale of plucky academics everywhere trying to log on to do their marking against seemingly insurmountable technological odds. Many thanks” - @SarahRoseCrook
- “The UCAS waiting tune is my new favourite song. Would highly recommend” -@rommo28

Other stories of the week

- **Teacher sickness.** It's a well-known blight of the teaching profession that teachers often suffer from sicknesses during holidays and weekends; they work or rush up to the last minute, then collapse feeling rough just as the holiday or weekend begins. This week, education commentator Laura McNerney published an interesting article on the matter and came up with a fascinating statistic: 22 hours. To quote: 'teachers who do more than 22 hours of classroom teaching a week had a sickness absence that was almost twice as high as those who taught for fewer than 22 hours.' No one's quite sure why but a link to the article is [here](#)
- **AI in the spotlight.** Next week sees the annual gathering of global leaders at Davos where AI (artificial intelligence) will once again be among the list of topics given high-level treatment. There's considerable re-assessment of the potential of AI going on at present and among the Papers listed is an interesting one from Brian Peccarelli of Thomson Reuters. This argues that far from AI powered robots replacing humans, they are helping make them smarter but this in turn is creating a need for humans to develop greater, what he calls 'learning agility.' The Paper can be found [here](#)



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Quote(s) of the week

- “ She (Dame Shirley Pearce) has appointed an expert group to advise her on the independent review and she intends to announce the membership of this group at the same time as she launches a public call for views to inform her review, which will be very shortly” – the Universities Minister responds to a question in Parliament about what is happening to the independent review of the TEF and the creation of an advisory group
- “What greets me at the door is an amazing and infectious enthusiasm-a dedication to do the job, an overriding desire to do good, to stand by students and to mould them into young people who will have great opportunities ahead” – the Skills Minister on what she finds when she visits colleges
- “We want to inspire and excite both potential apprentices and employers by showing that apprentices have a natural energy and enthusiasm that rubs off on everyone around them” – the DfE launches its new apprenticeships promo campaign
- “The safety of young people is our absolute priority and, like the Dept for education, we are committed to giving schools the right support so young people have safe and positive experiences online” – Facebook commits to the government’s new online safety lessons
- “I would argue they’ve got other more important things to deal with at the moment” – UCAS wonders whether schools really have the time at the moment to start changing the uni application process
- “I want to say, hand on heart, that you do not and should not spend a penny on consultants to prepare for the introduction of this framework” – Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman offers some advice as she launches consultation on the new inspection framework

Number(s) of the week

- 2,343,095. The total number of UKHE students in 2017/18, up 1% on the year before, according to the latest figures from the HE Statistics Agency
- 10%. How many higher education students manage to pay upfront thereby avoiding long-term loans and heavy interest rates, according to new research from the Intergenerational Foundation
- £1.58bn. How much money the DfE spent on apprenticeships last year, according to an answer given in Parliament
- 94%. The number of panel members questioned who supported Ofsted’s new emphasis on the quality of a school’s curriculum although only 4% believed inspectors would be able to do this well, according to a survey from Teacher Tapp
- 38%. How many academy trusts have committed to take action on top salaries, according to Schools Week
- £4m. How much funding has been allocated from the DCMS/Wolfson Museums and Galleries Improvement Fund to museums around the country to help extend available space and access, according to the DCMS

What to look out for next week

- Westminster Hall debate on FE funding (Monday)
- OECD ‘Trends Shaping Education’ Report (Monday)

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- Adjournment debate on the funding of Pupil Referral Units (Tuesday)
- World Economic Forum in Davos (Tuesday-Friday)
- BETT (Wednesday-Saturday)