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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 12 July 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.

Interim [SATs results](#), [Higher Tech Qualifications](#), the latest [update](#) on university admissions from UCAS, a new report on the impact of the EBacc, growing up in the UK today, and [rumours](#) of an impending funding announcement for schools, plenty of education headlines this week.

Elsewhere this week, the Education Committee [announced](#) a new inquiry into lifelong learning, the Association of Colleges (AoC) [published](#) its wish list ahead of any future Spending Review, the government issued new [guidance](#) to academies on executive pay, and schools were [encouraged](#) to become 'healthy schools' answering questions on things like food education and time spent on PE.

A lot going on therefore so here's a few details behind some of those top stories.

[SATs](#) first, the fourth year since the 'tougher' regime was applied, where there was a welcome increase in maths performance despite change to the threshold score. SATs remain contentious as the latest National Education Union (NEU) [survey](#) indicated and a Corbyn government has promised to scrap them at least in their present form. Yet the coming year will also see baseline assessment and multiplication checks, suggesting primary assessment and accountability will remain an important area of activity.

Higher Tech Qualifications next, a further element in the government's sweep of reforms around technical education and where this week the government kickstarted developments with a [paper](#) spelling out the case for change, a set of proposals for consultation and an impact assessment. As the case for change paper points out, these qualifications provide progression routes and advanced skills much in demand by employers but are poorly recognised and take up is low compared to other countries, hence the soubriquet 'the missing middle of the qualification system.' The government, is proposing among other things kite marking high quality qualifications and providers in a bid to raise both the profile and the uptake. Further announcements are expected later this year.

Still on higher levels, the latest [update](#) from UCAS, based on the important end of June staging post, make interesting reading. First because demand notably among young people from deprived areas let alone international applicants remains strong. And second because UCAS has added a new interactive tool to enable further delving into the data. Wonkhe has a helpful analysis of it all [here](#).

Finally, three reports this week from [Action for Children](#), the [Diana Award](#) and [Bright Blue](#) respectively highlight some of the challenges facing young people and adults today while the [FT](#) has suggested that the PM may announce more money for schools early next week.



Top headlines this week

- 'DfE to unveil new category of higher technical qualifications.' ([Monday](#))
- 'SATs: 65% of pupils reach expected standard in 3Rs.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Young people need help with independence.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'England university applications hit record numbers.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Scrap EBacc and reform Progress 8 to tackle creative subject slump.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **Childhood in crisis?** The charity Action for Children published the results of a new survey showing that across three generations (children, parents, grandparents) modern childhood is increasingly seen as becoming more challenging with bullying, social media, school pressures, even Brexit all contributing to anxieties
- **Business Barometer.** The OU published its latest annual Business Barometer looking at skills issues in the UK and finding many organisations still feeling very uncertain about the future and concerned about likely skills gaps
- **Missing the target.** UNESCO issued an update on the progress being made in meeting sustainable development goals in global education by 2030, showing that current goals are unlikely to be met meaning for instance some 40% of children globally would still fail to complete secondary education

HE

- **Higher Technical Education.** The government set out a 'Case for Change' and consultative recommendations for transforming higher technical education, based around three core proposals of kite-marked qualifications, a high-quality provider network and improved information and guidance
- **A little more independence.** The government announced a new series of 'Leapskills' digital workshops developed by Unite Students, the body that provides student accommodation, designed to help young people prepare for independent living once they leave home
- **Latest UCAS stats.** UCAS published analysis and data on the current status of university applications as of the latest big deadline of 30 June, showing record numbers of applications from 18 yr olds in England as well as internationally including notably China
- **Top degree trends.** The Office for Students (OfS) provided further analysis of the upward trend in first class honours awards where updated modelling indicated that a fair amount remained unexplained
- **Paying university governors?** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new discussion paper on whether governors should be paid, concluding that while this was an institutional decision, governing chairs and boards in other sectors do receive remuneration and this can enhance good governance



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FE/Skills

- **Spending Review asks.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) listed four main 'asks' from any future Spending Review, including a significant funding increase for provision for young people, a higher spend on adult learning, a new capital budget and a new strategic relationship with government generally
- **Capital stuff.** The government listed the first set of T level providers to receive an initial chunk of funding from its T level Capital Fund, set up to ensure that high-quality facilities will be in place for the first wave of T level students from next year, with more to follow
- **T level content.** The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) launched consultation on the proposed outline content for three new pathways including two in Business Admin and one in Hair and Beauty
- **Apprenticeship reform.** James Kirkup, director of the Social Market Foundation discussed apprenticeships in an article in The Telegraph arguing that they were gradually being adopted by the middle classes but that funding was needed to support schemes that deliver high skills and wages
- **The Forgotten Half.** Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) Director Paul Johnson examined the 50% who don't go to university and why they and the FE system generally have been neglected and so poorly funded in an analysis programme on Radio 4 that raised a number of interesting questions
- **ASALL for All?** The Education Committee announced a new inquiry into adult skills and lifelong learning (ASALL) with Committee Chair Rob Halfon calling among other things for an adult community learning centre in every town and a social justice tax credit for employers who invest in ASALL

Schools

- **SATs results.** The Government published the interim KS2 SATs results for this year showing a slight (1%) increase in the number of pupils reaching the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths although with a slight drop in reading specifically
- **Executive pay.** The government published new guidance for academy trust boards on executive pay outlining a series of factors such as trust academic and financial performance and the cost of the overall package that need to be taken into account when setting top pay levels
- **The EBacc effect.** The Education and Skills (EDSK) think tank examined the impact of the EBacc on schools in general and the curriculum in particular, pointing to quite a lengthy charge sheet that has seen some subjects marginalized and others with teacher recruitment difficulties, calling as a result for the concept to be scrapped and a reformed Progress 8 measure considered
- **Good and outstanding Schools.** The government published latest statistical information claiming that increasing numbers of children are now in Ofsted defined 'Good' or 'Outstanding' schools, especially sponsored academies
- **Working in disadvantaged areas.** The Sutton Trust published a new report, based on surveys conducted through Teach Tapp, on teachers working in disadvantaged areas and some of the recruitment and retention challenges involved, calling among other things for schools to have clear behaviour and pay policies as incentives
- **School inspection update.** Ofsted issued its final Update ahead of the introduction of a new framework from this September highlighting among other things how the intended phone call between the lead inspector and school leaders on the eve of an inspection should operate



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- **Parent View.** Ofsted updated its online survey used by schools to get the views of parents, taking out some questions and adding a few others to ensure it aligns with the new inspection framework
- **Teacher recruitment.** Teach First reported that not only had a record number of trainees been recruited and approved to work in schools from this September but that it was the most diverse group so far and covering many of the subjects and areas most in need
- **Health and wellbeing.** The government invited schools to (voluntarily) participate in its new healthy school rating scheme which will see schools rated for gold, silver and bronze awards against four headings including food education and time spent each week on PE
- **Taking a stand on bullying.** The Diana Award published new survey data on the extent of bullying faced by many young people highlighting the importance of suitable peer-to-peer support in schools
- **Orwell places.** Eton College announced it will offer 12 free sixth form places under its Orwell Award scheme to state school boys with potential but with limited opportunities to develop this

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "If you don't understand where someone is coming from on education, the following is a pretty good rule of thumb: you fiercely oppose selection right up to the point at which you personally benefited from it" - [@nickhillman](#)
- "Two new sets of stats: First class degrees awarded by universities rise from 15% to 29%, criticised by DFE and [@DamianHinds](#) as "unfair" and grade inflation. Good and outstanding schools go up from 66% to 85% and it's the govt's biggest boast in education" - [@seanjcoughlan](#)
- "Increasingly teachers are realising a lot of edtech is useless so don't want it. Edtech companies think this is a big problem" - [@bennewmark](#)
- "Headteacher writes children's books to fund her school after budget cuts" - [@schoolsontap](#)
- "Half of head teachers claim to have done laundry for pupils, survey finds" - [@EducatorMagUK](#)

Other stories of the week

- Changing social attitudes. 'Are we now a nation of secular, liberal rationalists with beliefs, attitudes and behaviours driven by empiricism and logic?' That's the question posed in the latest report on British Social Attitudes. Headlines include that we are becoming an increasingly secular society with 52% of respondents seeing themselves as not belonging to any religion. Instead perhaps, faith in science and technology is growing, changes in social attitudes towards sex and gender are continuing (although primary school teaching is still seen as a role more suited to women,) and 'Leave' or 'Remain' now provide the new political and social fault line. A summary of the findings can be found at this link [here](#)
- By their friends. The OECD published a new 'Focus' Paper on how much parents of 15 yr olds know about their child's school friends and parents suggesting that typically parents know about five of their child's school friends and four sets of parents of friends. Their argument is that the opportunity to build such social relationships not just with parents and their child's school friends but the school as well can be worth it as it helps the child develop a positive approach to learning as well as potentially raise skills in areas like problem solving. A link to the Paper can be found [here](#)



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Quote(s) of the week

- “My eldest is nine...I’d be very impressed if she wanted to do this at this point. But when the time comes, absolutely” – the Education Secretary responds to questions about whether he’d be happy for his own children to take one of the proposed new Higher Tech Qualifications
- “Abolishing these tests would be a terrible, retrograde step” – Nick Gibb responds to the latest calls for scrapping SATs tests
- “How often will you wash your sheets once you move out of home” – one of the likely prompt questions in the new digital workshops intended to help students prepare for independent living
- “We expect trusts to make the most of this guidance to ensure that their salary levels are publicly justifiable and provide the best value for money for their institution” – the government issues new guidance for academies on executive pay
- “I don’t think it’s fair that other people may have better opportunities to go and see them and make a better decision where to go” – the BBC looks into how far travel costs are denying some people from going on university open days
- “It would be a shame for this issue to be a distraction from bigger ones facing education” – Mike Buchanan, Executive Director at the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference (HMC) on potential Labour plans to tackle independent schools

Number(s) of the week

- 638,030. How many people have applied for a university place through UCAS so far this year, an increase of over 1,000 on last year according to latest figures from UCAS
- £4.4bn. How much organisations spent this year on recruiting workers with the skills they need, down 30% on the previous year as they adopt a grow-your-own approach, according to the OU’s latest Business Barometer
- 1,735. How many people have been recruited as trainee teachers by Teach First for this September, a record according to new figures from the charity
- 65%. How many children reached the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths in this year’s KS2 SATs according to the latest interim figures
- 38%. How many children reported they were worried about Brexit according to a new survey by the charity Action for Children
- 60%+. How many young people, aged 11-16, had experienced bullying at school, according to a survey from the Diana Award
- 70+. How many points a school would have to get to achieve a Gold Award under its new Healthy School rating scheme

What to look out for next week

- Westminster Hall debate on children and mental health (Tuesday)
- Westminster Hall debate on small school funding (Wednesday)



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- Science and Technology Committee witness session with the Universities Minister (Wednesday)