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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 19 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.

An end of term feel this week as many schools and colleges prepare to wind down for the summer and MPs prepare for the summer recess and the impact of a new PM.

Let's start with education matters first where it wouldn't be an end of term without a series of late notices from government. Most of these were directed at schools and included some nitty-gritty stuff on school [system financial accountability](#), [school attendance](#), [data collection workloads](#), [new teacher skill tests](#), [school improvement](#) and [school sports activity](#). More specifically, the Education Committee [published](#) the results of its year-long Inquiry into education funding, sharply rebuking the government for its diffident approach and calling for substantial investment as part of a 10-year funding plan.

Away from schools the big news for the skills sector has been the launch, at last, of the long-awaited [National Retraining Scheme](#), starting small scale with a 'Help to Retrain' programme in Liverpool but with important long-term potential as automation gradually bites away at the employment market. The week has also seen two more apprenticeship reports, one from the Institute of Student Employers with proposals for improving the apprenticeships system generally and the other from Universities UK calling for a big heave on [degree apprenticeships](#). Elsewhere, [FETL](#) (the Further Education Trust for Leadership) tackled another familiar topic, the impact of technology on learning, as part of its Summer Symposium.

In higher education we've had the first major [detailed study](#) into the career outcomes of international students who'd studied in UK universities, only a snapshot at this stage but overall very positive with for example over 80% happy with their experience and careers so far. Elsewhere, the Universities Minister talked about universities and colleges as 'beacons of inclusivity' in what seemed like a valedictory [speech](#), 'this may well be my last higher education speech as Universities Minister,' at Birkbeck College.

Finally on to that other theme of the week, the impending arrival of a new Prime Minister and with it obvious anticipation as to how policies will shape up in the future. When it comes to education, Rob Halfon, Chair of the Education Committee, became the latest to add his thoughts in a [comment piece](#) on conservativehome, arguing for an education agenda built around 4 Ss: skills, social justice, standards, and support for the profession. 'Four interlocking foundations for an education programme' in his words.

Education and skills have featured prominently throughout the leadership debates and there will be much interest in seeing whether school funding, skills reform, student financing, and visa reforms among other things get the support and attention they deserve in the coming weeks and months. Many will be hoping.



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Head of Ofsted calls for greater scrutiny of multi-academy trusts.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Teachers less valued than they were five years ago.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Schools could face new mental health inspections.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Parents use savings and second jobs to support children at university.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Schools desperately need cash injection, MPs say.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **10 year funding plan.** The Education Committee called on the government to, in its words ‘fix the broken education funding system,’ and bring forward a ten-year funding plan with increased investment in the 16-19 base rate, school funding, high needs and Pupil Premium support
- **The 4 Ss.** Education Committee Chair Rob Halfon set out his thoughts on a new education and skills agenda for the incoming Prime Minister to consider, built around the 4Ss of skills, social justice, standards and support for the profession
- **Fiscal risks report.** The Office for Budget Responsibility published its latest comprehensive Fiscal Risks Report outlining potential ‘shocks and pressures’ over the mid to long term suggesting that policy risks in the medium term are ‘significant’ as summarized in this 2-page executive summary
- **Lowering the threshold.** The BBC reported that business and education groups were calling on the new Prime Minister to lower the salary threshold for foreign workers to come and work in the UK from £30,000 to £20,000 to enable employers to take on more essential workers in the future
- **Living Standards Audit 2019.** The Resolution Foundation published the latest in its series of audits on trends in UK living standards indicating weak income growth in many households over the last couple of years and poverty now affecting more younger families and children
- **UK Economic Outlook.** The professional services firm PwC published its latest Economic Outlook for the UK suggesting growth will remain modest into next year, the housing market will continue to cool, and job creation faces a potential slowing down listing a mix of policies needed as a result, including increased vocational training and retraining of older workers around new technologies
- **Equality in the Digital Age.** The IPPR think tank looked into the issue of automation suggesting that it could affect men and women in the labour market differently and calling for a number of measures to ensure that women were not marginalised as the job market changed

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- **End of term address.** Chris Skidmore, the Universities Minister called on universities to continue making progress in developing access and participation and developing flexible provision whether he remains Universities Minister in the future or not
- **International graduate outcomes.** Universities UK published a new report undertaken by iGraduate looking into career projections for international graduates from UK universities showing high levels



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(90%) of satisfaction rates and with 83% of the 16,000+ respondents reporting that their qualification had helped them get their job

- **Graduate Outcomes.** The government published new LEO data on graduate earnings by region in 2016/17 suggesting that on average graduates earn a median annual survey of £19,000 a year after graduating rising to £26,000 after five years
- **Reforming the student visa system.** Leading university organisations outlined their thoughts on how best to reform the student visa system listing five principles as a basis for reform such as improving the experience for students and ensuring transparency, with a set of proposals for how to achieve these
- **Review of the Student loans Company.** The government published its tailored review into the performance of the Student Loans Company, noting a Company that had significantly changed and in many cases improved but one that was facing further considerable challenges from Augar, Brexit and so on with recommendations on governance, effectiveness and future operations proposed accordingly

FE/Skills

- **National Retraining.** The government launched its long-awaited National Retraining Scheme with an online help service of skill assessment, retraining and employment opportunities for those on lower wages in Liverpool
- **Brexit preparation.** The government issued further guidance for FE institutions and apprenticeships providers in England covering requirements where necessary for staff students, travel and food supplies and pointing to a new skills-based immigration system being in place in 2021
- **Degree apprenticeships.** Universities UK examined degree apprenticeships arguing that they have a lot to offer both apprentices and employers but that a big campaign of public awareness is needed to raise their profile
- **Improving the apprenticeship system.** The Institute of Student Employers (ISE) set out a range of proposals for improving the apprenticeship system including doubling the levy expiry date and looking again at the 20% off the job requirement
- **Assessment charge.** FE Week reported that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) had delayed introducing its per learner charge for apprenticeship quality assurance until November as further discussion continues about future arrangements
- **OfS fees.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) issued guidance to colleges about the costs of subscription to the Office for Students (OfS) explaining why the fees were as high as they were and urging caution about taking remedial action
- **English and maths funding rules.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) published an interactive tool to help providers follow the changes to the condition of funding guidance that apply for English and maths from this September
- **Letter to Chairs of Governors.** Eileen Milner, Chief Executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) took what she called 'the unusual step' of writing to chairs of governors and outlining their responsibilities and requirements when it comes to overseeing the use of public funds, following a recent college investigation
- **From the Field.** John Field, a leading commentator on lifelong learning, outlined four proposals including revised learning accounts and accessible digital resources, as part of his response as the Centenary Commission gathers evidence on adult learning



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Schools

- **Financial measures.** The government launched a consultation on improving financial accountability and transparency around LA schools claiming that adopting measures being used in academies would help improve the system and put it on an even keel
- **Data burdens.** The government issued its response to the workload advisory group on 'Making Data work,' confirming that it had accepted all recommendations in full and calling on school system leaders to ensure good practice principles were observed
- **Teacher qualifications.** The government confirmed that it was scrapping the current skills tests for incoming teachers from this October and instead making teacher training providers responsible for ensuring prospective teachers meet expected levels of literacy and numeracy
- **School Attendance.** The government issued new non-statutory guidance to help schools and local authorities maintain high levels of attendance and best plan the school year
- **School improvement.** The government announced a series of measures to support high performing trusts and underperforming schools with funding and leadership guidance from this September
- **Brexit preparation.** The government issued further guidance for schools on how to prepare for Brexit covering teachers, families and pupils, travel and food supplies
- **Opportunity knocking.** The Education Committee wrote to the Education Secretary outlining some concerns it had about the government's Opportunity Areas programme highlighting in particular issues about value for money, independence from government and programme selection
- **MAT futures.** Ofsted reported on its investigation into multi-academy trusts (MATs) noting how they'd grown and the important role they play in the education system but arguing that they should undertake their own self-evaluation and that Ofsted should conduct inspections of trusts as well as the schools within them
- **Costing the middle tier.** Sara Bubb Associates published a new report, commissioned by the Local Government Association, into the costs of overseeing a dual system of academy and local authority schools in England suggesting that it was confusing and costly
- **Educating the digital generation.** The Nuffield Foundation reported on the use of technology in schools concluding among other things that on its own doesn't improve students' digital literacy and doesn't fully prepare young people for the workplace, calling as a result for further research into the implications of future development for teaching and learning
- **Home education.** The Local Government Association (LGA) acknowledged the introduction of a register for home-educated children but argued that this will be of limited use if councils aren't granted powers to enter premises and check up on children's schooling
- **Funding matters.** The group campaigning for more funding for schools costed out how much how much would be needed over the next few years to reverse cuts and meet growing demands
- **Dashboard information.** Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) reflected in a comment piece for the TES on how the SATs system could be improved, suggesting for instance test results could be part of a wider dashboard of information for parents
- **Be a sport.** The government issued a statement of intent to ensure support and provision is available for children to be able to participate in at least 60 minutes of activity every day as part of its School Sport and Activity Action Plan



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Tweets(s) of the week.

- “Education policy is an enormous montage of different worlds. The new PM should collate these into one ambitious strategy” - [@halfon4harlowMP](#)
- “We will scrap interest on student loans” - [@brexitparty_uk](#)
- “When the social class of uni attendees was more... homogenous, I'm sure library fines made sense” - [@jim_dickinson](#)
- “If all goes according to plan, TeachFirst may provide as many as 1% of the teachers teaching in England's schools” - [@dylanwiliam](#)
- “For homework, my 9yo daughter had to research the 1990s. It was suggested that she interview a grandparent. A grandparent” - [@jdurran](#)
- “Electronic textbooks may be the future. But you can't do rude drawings on them” - [@AndrosHuntsman](#)

Other stories of the week

- The reality of student finance. The costs of going to university continue to be a big talking point and this week Which? reported on its latest survey of students. Apparently most (89 %+) of students have some form of loan although a lot still rely on the Bank of Mum and Dad. Interestingly, most students surveyed reckoned they understood the repayment terms of their loans but when questioned a bit further with true or false questions, they seemed less sure. A link to the article is [here](#)
- What school reports really mean. No doubt much of this tongue in cheek and some of it is a bit laboured but the Daily Telegraph carried a guide this week to what is really meant in some of those end of term school reports. For example: ‘A pleasure to teach’ means ‘she laughs at my jokes’ and ‘I hope she enjoys a restful summer’ means ‘I know both us are looking forward to a six week period of separation.’ The guide is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “There are long-term pressures on revenue from some tax bases, from trends in smoking, drinking and car efficiency, and from the digitalization of economic activity”- the Office for Budget Responsibility assesses future fiscal risks
- “This is a big and complex challenge which is why we are starting small, learning as we go, and releasing each part of the scheme only when it's ready to benefit its users” – the Education Secretary announces the start of the National Retraining Scheme
- “It's perverse just to lend them finance for a degree but not for other opportunities such as apprenticeships, training or starting a business” – Former Education Secretary Justine Greening calls on an incoming PM to hold a social mobility emergency budget to provide support for future generations
- “I am looking forward to leading the Institute into the future of technical education” – Jennifer Coupland on being appointed as the new Chief Executive of the Institute for apprenticeships and Technical Education from this November



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- “We want to make sure that schools are only collecting the data they need and not collecting or monitoring unnecessary data for audit purposes” – the Education Secretary sets out principles for data collection in schools in the future
- “No MAT is an island” – Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman calls for wider use of self-evaluation and the use of Ofsted inspections in a new research report on MATs
- “There are no political games going on here where we pitch high in the hope that the government will meet us part way” – ASCL general secretary Geoff Barton

Number(s) of the week

- 76%. The UK employment rate for the period March - May 2019, slightly down on the previous quarter, according to the latest official figures
- £360 a month. How much parents on average are contributing to support their children at university, according to a survey by Which?
- £20. How much student rents have risen per month since last year, according to a new survey by NatWest
- £4,760. What the new per student base rate for post-16 funding should be, according to the Education Committee
- £12.6bn. How much is needed over the next four years to reverse cuts to school funding, according to the latest union campaign
- £167.05. The average costs per pupil of overseeing the academy system in England, according to a new report
- 80%+. How many respondents reckoned that the level of competitive sport being offered had increased since the Sport Premium was introduced two years ago, according to research from the DfE
- 78%. How many people in a survey said more needed to be done to recognise the work of teachers, according to a survey commissioned by the Chartered College

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee witness session with Philip Augar and others (Tuesday)
- Result of the Conservative Party leadership contest announced (Tuesday)
- Theresa May resigns as PM (Wednesday)
- Parliament's Summer Recess begins (Thursday)