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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 14 June 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.

Tech developments, higher education and qualification choice for 16 year olds head the main education stories this week.

Tech developments first where this week's London Tech Week, [launched](#) by the Prime Minister at the start of the week, spawned a range of associated speeches, reports and activities. The PM was anxious to demonstrate that as she put it, 'British tech is thriving' with increased investment both from at home and abroad and she reeled off a string of initiatives including more funding for adult online learning, new places and funding for AI and data masters conversion courses, and the creation of a new Digital Markets Unit, as evidence of this. The Industrial Strategy continues to provide the circuit map for developments.

AI (artificial intelligence) has been one of the big themes of the week. According to a Kantar survey, 63% of people reckon they now know something about AI and 12% quite a lot, and it has featured in two important accompanying reports this week. One was from the [McKinsey Global Institute](#) with an upbeat message that the UK was in a stronger starting position than much of Europe albeit with the need to develop its talent stream and learn how to scale up more efficiently. The other was a commissioned [report](#) from the DfE looking at the online learning and AI education market arguing that the potential for AI products and provision has yet to be fully realized.

Higher ed next where two developments stand out. First the Education Secretary bundled up his recent incursions on matters like grade inflation and unconditional offers into an additional [remit letter](#) to the Office for Students, noting in particular their plans to conduct a review of the admissions process later this year and to quality assess L6+ apprenticeships.

Second, the HE Policy Institute and AdvanceHE [published](#) the latest in their annual surveys into the academic experience of students. Some of the issues such as value for money and contact time are long-standing, others such as mental health concerns and accelerated degrees are more recent. Either way, a fascinating and largely positive picture, in contrast to some recent headlines, emerges.

Third, qualification choices for 16 year olds and above where government consultation on qualification choices at Level 3 and below closed at the start of the week. The government is keen to see a simpler, set of routes focused on A' levels and T levels, but as responses have indicated, many young people at this stage are often better served by a middle route that includes the current vocational options. The BBC's Education Editor, Branwen Jeffreys, has a good summary of the issues [here](#).



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Top headlines this week

- ‘Scrapping BTECs could make student grades worthless.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Universities condemn ‘catastrophic’ plan to link fees to graduate pay.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Give 16 year olds more choice – employers.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Students support disclosure of mental illness to parents.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Secondary teachers want more flexible working patterns.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [London Tech Week](#). The Prime Minister opened London Tech Week pitching the UK as a leading tech nation and announcing among other things additional global investment and new AI conversion courses and scholarships
- [McKinsey on UKAI](#). The McKinsey Global Institute published a new Briefing Paper on the current state of play on artificial intelligence in the UK suggesting the UK is in a leading position but that it’s all very competitive and we still need to develop the skills and learn to scale up more effectively
- [The Minister on AI](#). Jeremy Wright, Secretary of State at the Dept of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) addressed the AI Summit held as part of London Tech Week where he outlined the leading work the UK was doing in this area and pointed to two further challenges: developing a digitally skilled workforce and improving diversity across the sector
- [The online and AI market](#). The DfE published commissioned research, undertaken last summer, into the extent and nature of the online and artificial intelligence in education markets concluding that while the former is more established and easy to access, the latter is less so, calling among other things for more provision at Levels 4/5 and better understanding of user needs generally
- [National Data Strategy](#). The government issued a call for evidence with a focus on three areas in particular: people; the economy; and government, as it seeks to develop a National Data Strategy
- [Addicted to social media](#). Barnardo’s published a new survey report indicating that children as young as two were looking at social media and by the age of five, some were becoming addicted

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- [And another thing](#). The Education Secretary added a few more priorities to his previous remit letter to the Office for Students, based largely on his recent interventions around grade inflation, essay mills, unconditional offers and the admissions system generally
- [Students Academic Experience](#). The HE Policy Institute and AdvanceHE published the results of their latest dive into the academic experience of university students today, offering a fascinating and increasingly positive picture for many students but with challenges like the ‘expectations gap’ and mental health issues clearly evident
- [Gone abroad](#). UniversitiesUK published its latest report into the trends and outcomes for undergrads who had spent some time abroad, looking this time at 2016/17 leavers and showing an increase in



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numbers spending time abroad especially for short-term opportunities with continuing benefits in terms of degree level and job opportunities

- **UKRI Delivery Plans.** UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) reported on its first year of activity which has seen over 24,000 projects supported and set out its plans for the future, based around six themes, as it works on a government's target of 2.4% of GDP being spent on research and innovation by 2027
- **Campus safety.** The Office for Students (OfS) published the latest evaluative reports from Advance HE on what impact various funded projects have had in tackling hate crime and sexual harassment on university campuses noting that while some progress had been made, more progress was needed to ensure incidents were not just reported on but also action taken as well

FE/Skills

- **The Manchester Way.** Greater Manchester published its full Local Industrial Strategy with ambitious plans to be a leader in health care, digitalization and innovation and with extensive plans to raise skill levels, careers support, apprenticeship opportunities and support for those with low-level qualifications
- **Focusing on FE.** David Hughes, Chief Exec of the Association of Colleges urged Tory leadership hopefuls not to forget FE, setting out three ways (looking at the wider benefits, maintaining the profile, and mobilizing supporters) in which they were keeping the pressure on
- **From Leitch to Augar.** Tom Bewick, the Chief Exec of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, reflected on the recent Augar review and how far things had improved since the last great review of post-compulsory education and training, the 2006 Leitch review, arguing that the challenges about how to create a fit for purpose skills system, remain as pressing as before
- **Update on Voc Quals.** Ofqual published its quarterly report on VQs and associated qualifications covering the first quarter of this year and showing a downward trend in many areas resulting largely from funding restrictions and qualification changes
- **In response.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) published its response to the government's consultation on Level 3 and below qualifications, listing 10 key principles which it believes should be adopted in the reforms and highlighting the importance of keeping a choice of routes open for young people
- **In Unison.** The public service union, Unison, reported on its survey of support staff in colleges on the issue of weapon-related crime, finding most had received no training and calling for better support and training as a result

Schools

- **Re-inspections.** Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman repeated her call for outstanding schools to face routine re-inspections as the latest evidence shows a continuing drop in the performance of such schools exempted from inspections
- **Flexible working.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) examined the issue of flexible working for teachers in secondary schools noting it that was becoming increasingly popular among teachers and offered benefits to both schools and teachers but that there were issues such as timetabling to be overcome as well
- **Free Schools.** The government announced that a further 22 applications for Free Schools had been approved arguing that many were in areas of greatest need



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- **School choices.** The Education Policy Institute looked into the government data on school choice preference arguing that when it comes to getting their first choice of secondary school, many families miss out concluding that a review of school admissions is long overdue
- **Better Schools for All?** The National Institute of Economic and Social Research and Institute of Education published new research, funded by Nuffield, looking into pupil attainment suggesting that parental involvement and early years support tend to be more important factors in pupil attainment than whether a school is deemed good or not
- **Taking the Next Step.** The National Governance Association (NGA) along with ASCL and education advisers brownejacobson updated their guidance for schools and governors considering joining a new school grouping such as a multi-academy trust
- **Teachers in multi-academy trusts.** The Education Policy Institute along with Ambition Institute and Cambridge Assessment looked at teacher supply and progression in multi-academy trusts, highlighting ways in which trusts manage talent and support upward progression

Tweets(s) of the week.

- “In today's @BBCNews "You don't switch off funding for qualifications that are being used until you have something that is demonstrably better," @AoCDavidH #LoveOurColleges” - @AoC_Info
- “FE can't deliver the necessary explosion in Level 4/5 courses on its own. HE will need to collaborate” @CSkidmoreUK #HEPIAC2019” - @MaryCurnockCook
- “Schools are being encouraged to put up posters to make it clear to pupils, parents and visitors that they won't tolerate abuse of their staff” - @SchoolsWeek
- “Can we start a thread of stoopid teaching metaphors? For example, I visited a school with pictures of fried eggs on the walls. The yolk was the lesson objective and the white was the learning environment and the crispy edge was the bad behaviour. I think” -@KateClamchy1
- “I sometimes wonder what would happen if I responded to every "I hope you're well?" email with a detailed account of my morale and medical predicaments” - @Sathnam

Other stories of the week

- **Conference blues.** The Times Higher reported this week on an interesting project being undertaken by an American researcher. It involves looking into why so many people feel tempted to nod off at conferences. Many people may have been there, citing perhaps an early start, a heated room, or a calming speaker as factors but his premise is that a build-up of carbon dioxide levels is to blame. At some conferences, he reckons these reach alarming levels and he's calling for better ventilation and more coffee breaks. Many delegates may agree. A link to the article is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “You can do anything on gov.uk, from getting a divorce to finding out how to import a ferret. Although I don't think anyone has tried both on the same day” – the Digital Secretary of State illustrates the extent of digital services



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- “The government is due to publish an updated study in the coming months on the earnings premium graduates can expect from holding a degree” – the Universities Minister responds to questions in Parliament about the how to perceive ‘value’ in different degree subjects
- “The idea of social mobility where you pluck somebody out of poverty and promote them into a private school education or promote them somewhere else doesn’t actually help the majority” – Jeremy Corbyn suggests that a future Labour government would approach social mobility differently
- “We are a nation that celebrates our Oscar winners and our big names in fashion, but we don’t ask where they came from. If that education pipeline is broken we will be poorer as a country” – the V.C. of the Norwich University of the Arts highlights concerns that Augar might result in less funding for creative subjects
- “Adopting a middle ground of an applied route that sits between academic and technical routes is , in our view, likely to result in better outcomes for the cohort at level 3 than presenting all students with binary choice between an academic or a technical route” – the ASCL calls for a middle route to remain in its response to the L3 and below consultation
- “Controlling for the similarity of pupils in schools means that schools account for around 9% of variance in pupils’ attainment” - a new report from the NIESR and IoE examines whether it matters what secondary school you go to
- “Just because a number is written on a spreadsheet doesn’t make it gospel” – Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman on the dangers of spreadsheet fixations

Number(s) of the week

- 0.3%. The figure for rolling three-month growth in the economy for April, down from 0.5% over the previous quarter according to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 32.75m. The number of people in employment in the UK in the three months up to April 2019, up by 32,000, according to latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 22%. The sort of boost that AI could deliver to the UK economy by 2030, according to a new Paper on AI in the UK by McKinsey
- 64%. How many undergrads would choose the same course and the same university if they were applying again, according to the latest survey from the HE Policy Institute and AdvanceHE
- 16%. The number of outstanding schools that have managed to retain their top rating in inspections so far this year, according to latest data from Ofsted
- 80.9% and 90.6%. How many applicants got their first choice secondary and primary school respectively this year, according to latest DfE figures
- 21%. How many children aged 7-16 and with a higher proportion of girls, thought they weren’t clever, according to new research from GL Assessment
- 32% and 70%. How many primary and how many secondary pupils fail to get their recommended nine hours a night of sleep, according to a survey conducted by the British Nutrition Foundation as part of Healthy Eating Week



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What to look out for next week

- Adult Learners Week (Monday – Sunday)
- Launch of OECD's latest TALIS report on international teaching and learning (Wednesday)
- Festival of Education (Thursday, Friday)