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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 28 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.

No standout headline but plenty to catch up on in the world of education this week.

In Westminster, MPs used one of the last occasions in this session to [question](#) Education Ministers, with funding, Augar, assessment and special needs prominent among the issues raised. A couple of days later the Education Secretary [appeared](#) before the Education Committee in what one commentator described as a 'rather strained' session where many similar issues were raised and where the headline news was an admission that the apprenticeship target was likely to be missed.

In what's been a busy week for the DfE, it has issued important [statutory guidance](#) on Relationship Education in schools which early adopter schools will be running with this year before it becomes compulsory the year after, and [published](#) non-statutory guidance on teaching pupils about online safety.

And before we leave the Westminster arena, three other stories to note. First, the DfE has [released](#) its latest dept plan offering a useful outline of progress and priorities. Second, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee has [raised](#) concerns about some aspects of DfE activity such as academy oversight or lack of and third, the Home Secretary has [called](#) on the Migration Advisory Committee to look into salary thresholds for immigrant workers which many have argued are too high for some sectors.

Away from Westminster, the season of Festivals and Conferences has continued. Many in HE have been at the annual Festival of HE hosted by the University of Buckingham where Augar, universities and learning of the future, and student welfare have been among the issues under discussion. Training providers meanwhile have been participating in their annual Conference while College leaders have come together to [call on](#) the government to honour the Augar proposals on investment in training and skills.

Elsewhere this week, there've been a number of notable reports released, four for instance around skills and training and one on ESOL all listed below, but [one report](#), the latest snapshot of what it called 'Elitist Britain 2019,' has seized many of the headlines.

The report, an update on things five years ago, brought together the Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission to examine the educational background of leading people in nine occupational areas ranging from politics and business to women and sport. As the Commission noted in its Nation report, things haven't changed a great deal with most top people likely to have attended a fee-paying school. Three of its ten recommendations involve education, a reminder of the key role education plays in social mobility.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Academy asks private school parents for 3k donations.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Elite five times more likely to have private education.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Hinds: apprenticeship target will not be reached.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Tory hopefuls told not to squander UK science progress.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Gig economy in Britain doubles accounting for 4.7m workers.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **DfE current plan.** The DfE published its latest departmental plan listing progress made and key future priorities under its five main delivery areas of children, schools, post-16, corporate transformation and EU exit
- **Cause for concern.** The Public Accounts Committee issued its latest report on which government activity it was keeping an eye on as possible causes of concern, pointing to the DfE and in particular financial pressures on schools, a lack of grip over academies and failure to improve children's social care, as being at the top of the list
- **Rising to the Top.** The Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission published a new report on the educational background of leading figures in Britain covering those in politics, the media, business and sport and showing that those at the top were five times more likely to have attended a fee-paying school
- **Key workers.** The Home Secretary called on the Migration Advisory Committee to look again at the £30,000 salary threshold for immigrants to qualify for a post-Brexit work visa suggesting that it might rule out some skilled workers in key areas and needs to allow for more flexibility
- **What about the workers?** The Commission on Workers and Technology which has been chaired by Yvette Cooper MP, reported that many employees felt they were being left out of discussions on how technology might affect their work and lives, and called for politicians, business and union leaders to do more to help and support workers through technological change

HE

- **Going European.** The European Commission announced which universities, including three from the UK, (Edinburgh, Essex, Warwick) from across Europe would form part of the first wave to test out the model of European inter-university campuses where resources would be pooled and staff and students move freely around various sites
- **Don't forget R/D.** Leading businesses, universities and science and research academies called on the two Tory leadership contenders and supporters to commit to prioritizing R/D in future and in particular to meeting the target of investing 2.4% rising to 3% of GDP in time, on R/D
- **Treatment of student loans.** The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provided an update on the work being done to model the impact of student loans in the public finances following last December's decision to record non repaid loans as part of the current deficit, indicating that it had increased its estimate of the impact and would make a further statement in September 2019



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- **Student loan forecasts.** The government published its latest set of forecast data on HE student numbers, student loan outlay and repayments for over the next five years showing gradual growth in eligible undergrad entrants particularly from 2021/22 but some concerns about growing costs as well
- **Free Speech and Censorship on Campus.** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a new Occasional Paper arguing the case for free speech in universities and noting that imposing restrictions tend to end up being counter-productive

FE/Skills

- **Dear Minister.** Leaders of every FE College across England signed up to an open letter to the Chancellor and Education Secretary calling on them to honour the Augar review recommendations on 'investing in the country's technical and vocational education system'
- **Managing with less.** The FT reported on the plight of FE colleges, struggling to cope with reduced budgets while trying to deliver essential skills and support training
- **Spending plan.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) published a 10-point skills investment plan ahead of its Annual Conference setting out a number of funding proposals on apprenticeships, traineeships and adult budgets for the Treasury to consider as part of a future Spending Review
- **External Quality Assurance.** The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) published its new framework for external quality assurance of end point assessments for apprenticeships
- **Skill system strains.** The British Chambers of Commerce and global job site Indeed reported on continuing concerns from employers about recruiting the skilled staff they need finding many with concerns about apprenticeships, T levels and the time it takes to fill a high skilled vacancy
- **Future of the Labour Market.** The Learning and Work Institute's (Youth) Commission looking into how to improve educational and employment opportunities for 16-24 year olds followed up its initial report by highlighting some of the trends and challenges likely to affect young people's working lives in the future
- **Post-16 Aspirations and Outcomes.** The Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER) published research into learning routes and outcomes undertaken by two cohorts of post-16 students, submitted as evidence to the Augar review
- **ESOL provision.** The government published its commissioned report into ESOL access and progression based on research undertaken between June 2018 and March 2019 and showing considerable demand for provision, particularly from those seeking work but with variable forms of provision on offer

Schools

- **Academy trust finances.** The government issued an updated financial handbook for academy trusts to take effect from this September incorporating a number of strengthened procedures including an independent annual audit, risk register, whistleblowing procedure and robust governance
- **Teaching online safety in school.** The government issued new non-statutory guidance to help schools teach pupils about the dangers of online activity by incorporating learning about the risks into many existing and new subjects such as Relationship Education, Citizenship Education and Computing



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- **Relationship Education.** The government published its final statutory guidance on Relationship Education and announced that it would be convening a new working group to help support the implementation of the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education provision from 2020
- **Facts and figures on schools.** The government published the latest (as of Jan 2019) set of data on schools showing that the number of pupils in schools in England has continued to grow for each of the last 10 years with average class sizes in secondary rising to 21.7
- **Getting young people work ready.** The CBI reported that both employers and young people felt that young people weren't being adequately prepared for the world of work, proposing among other things a rethink of GCSEs, a broadening of the EBacc and a big push on careers guidance and character development
- **Working in challenging schools.** The government published the results of commissioned research into the issues around working in challenging schools with many teachers concerned about the potential impact it might have on their work-life balance and calling for better support and incentives
- **Quality inspections.** Ofsted reported on the evidence base it has been building and the work it has been doing with inspectors to enable them to make accurate judgements about the quality of education as part of the new inspection regime
- **Reducing the need for restraint.** The government issued new non-statutory advice to help provide those who work with children and young people in difficult circumstances with appropriate strategies and guidance on how to deal with challenging behaviour
- **Special needs.** Three families seeking special needs funding support and provision for their children brought their case to the High Court
- **Children's literacy.** The National Literacy Trust marked National Writing Day by showing how important author/poet visits to schools can be in raising pupil reading skills and enjoyment and launching two new projects to enable more children from disadvantaged backgrounds to have the same opportunities

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "Interesting that more UK pop stars privately educated than university vice chancellors" - [@seanjcoughlan](#)
- "We spent 40 mins of last week's Computing lesson waiting for some laptops to load because of Windows updates. One child never even got to start his work as a result" - [@OneAboutSue](#)
- "Teachers should enrich life, not worship the machine" - [@FT](#)
- "Why did lesson observation provide such a litany of woe and absurdity? Simple. Because teaching was- and often still is- folk teaching: intuition, hunches, wheel re-invention, 'this worked for me'. Without evidence bases, it founders, or rather, rudderless, it lists" - [@tombennett71](#)
- "Teachers: Are you worried your students have developed "Nomophobia" (the fear of being without a mobile phone) or Textaphrenia (the fear of being disconnected)?" - [@educationweek](#)
- "Best thing I ever heard on a London bus, during a heatwave - one girl to another: "It's the humidity that kills you, babe, not the heat" - [@Sathnam](#)

Other stories of the week



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- **What college students want.** In an interesting sign of the times, the New York Times reported on the changing tastes of college students. The millennial college generation apparently craved luxury items such as pools and tanning rooms in their college accommodation while today's Generation Z hankers after digital conveniences and wellness facilities. An interesting sign of the times perhaps.
- **How technology might transform our lives.** For anyone concerned about what impact technology might have on our lives, good or bad, the innovation foundation, Nesta has published a collection of ten little studies on how technology might be changing the lives of different fictional people by 2030.

Quote(s) of the week

- "We must ensure that the report is taken as a whole and that HE is not just plucked out" – the Universities Minister tells MPs that the Augar review should not be cherry picked
- "What we need now are decisions and commitments" – College leaders across the country call on the government to implement the Augar proposals on investing in the skills and FE system
- "I will always make the case for 16-to-19 funding. I will never cease to do so; it is absolutely critical that we get the base rate up higher for schools and colleges" – the FE Minister responds to a question in Parliament about funding
- "Our guiding principles have been that all of the compulsory subject content must be age appropriate and developmentally appropriate" – the government introduces its statutory guidance on Relationships Education
- "The class of 2017 left college with an average of \$28,650 each in debt, according to a report by the Institute for College Access and success" – The Guardian reports that student debt looks like being a defining issue in the 2020 US Presidential campaign among Democrats
- "Using school type as a simplistic proxy for privilege is flawed" – the organisation for leading independent schools responds to the latest report on Elitist Britain

Number(s) of the week

- £73.5bn. The DfE's current departmental expenditure limit (DEL,) according to its latest departmental plan
- £40. How much the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) is proposing to charge when it quality assures end-point assessment for apprenticeships
- 55%. The number of employers in a survey by the British Chambers of Commerce and job site Indeed, who claimed not to have ever heard of T levels
- 965 and 282. How many pupils are on roll in the average state funded secondary and primary school respectively in England, according to the latest, Jan 2019, data
- 8,587. The number of children and young people classified as special needs but awaiting a school place, according to new figures from the National Education Union
- 54%. How many parents in a survey were not aware of the new relationship education requirements for primary schools, according to a survey cited in the TES
- 20%. How many adults in a survey commissioned as part of UK Robotics Week, thought that robotics education should be included in the school curriculum



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- 32. The 'pass' mark for this year's phonics screening check, the same as in recent years, as confirmed by the Standards and Testing Agency

What to look out for next week

- Wonkhe event on 'Counting the cost of Augar.' (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session with Edward Timpson. (Wednesday)