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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 7 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 big headline this week, for education at least, but plenty to take in. It includes an important piece of news, a [statement](#) from the Education Secretary on the Augar report along with a further stream of digests on the report, some published responses to the Level 3 and below consultation due to close on Monday, another [debate](#) by MPs on school funding and the first meeting of the EdTech Leadership Group.

That piece of news first courtesy of an [appearance](#) in front of a Parliamentary Committee by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss MP, where she suggested that it was now likely that this autumn's Spending Review would have to be postponed. Instead, departmental spending plans would be rolled over for another year. This has not been officially confirmed but given a change of Prime Minister and build-up to Brexit, it's a decision many people have been anticipating although it doesn't make future planning any easier.

On to higher education where heads are still spinning over last week's Augar report. In his statement to the House on Tuesday complementing the report, the Education Secretary faced a stream of questions about how future funding will play out, about whether one sector will be pitted against other when it comes to resources and basically what happens now. He stuck to the line that it was an independent panel review report which would feed into the Spending Review, although as we've heard the timing of that now appears uncertain. For those looking for more detailed analysis of the Augar report, there's been a stream of excellent analysis and commentary this week, four examples of which are highlighted below, including some interesting [thoughts](#) from panel member Professor Alison Wolf.

On to FE and Skills where apart also from reflections on Augar, a new [report](#) on digital skills, and the [unveiling](#) of the T level logo, responses have started to be published on the government's initial Level 3 and below qualification consultation which closes on Monday. Key issues, and raised in the responses from [Ofqual](#) and the Association of Employment and Learning Providers ([AELP](#)), both of which have been released this week, are the need for such qualifications to have a clear purpose, for employers to be able to source a range of qualifications that can match needs and perhaps most significant of all, for students to have adequate choice. "There is a risk that a barrier to progress may be created if alternative choices are unduly restricted," as Ofqual put it.

Finally to schools where Tory leadership contenders have been [spraying](#) around promises about school funding, MPs have been debating the national funding formula as well as looking at how to [strengthen](#) secondary school performance in the North East and where EdTech companies have been [invited](#) to bid for funds to help develop digital solutions for schools on matters like timetabling and essay marking.



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Top headlines this week

- 'PM hopefuls compete on school funding crisis.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Ofqual: Scrapping BTECs could create barrier.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Teacher mental health training goes national.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'University regulator unveils £14m scheme to reduce student suicides. ([Thursday](#))
- 'Sajid Javid seeks to lift work restrictions on foreign students.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Delivering Skills for the New Economy](#). The CBI and Tata Consultancy published a new report on digital skills, suggesting that the UK was at 'a tipping point' in this regard and calling for a ramping up of government initiatives in this area with a focus on software engineering and data analytics skills
- [Sure Start works](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) examined the impact of Labour's Sure Start programme for young children and families, suggesting that certainly in its peak years it brought many long-term benefits for disadvantaged families
- [Lifting children out of poverty](#). The Child Poverty Action Group argued in a new report that by reversing recent cuts, restoring benefits and uprating child benefit, some 700,000 children in the UK could be lifted out of poverty by 2023
- [UK 2070](#). The UK 2070 Commission looking into economic and regional disparity in the UK published the first of what's intended to be three reports, calling among other things for enhanced local devolution, improved local transport networks and a new £10bn pa UK Renewal Fund
- [Youth mobility](#). The Resolution Foundation looked at why fewer numbers of young people seemed prepared to move in search of employment suggesting that among the likely reasons was the fact that housing costs had risen faster than wages in some parts of the country making such moves unattractive

HE

- [Implementing Augar](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) reflected on last week's Augar report, pointing to many positives but concluding that delivering policy change can often be harder than devising it
- [Wolf on Augar](#). Panel member Professor Alison Wolf offered her thoughts on the Augar report highlighting the extent of funding issues around further and technical education and concluding that the report raised a number of issues for an incoming Prime Minister to take on board
- [Crossing borders](#). Mark Leach, CEO of Wonkhe, added his thoughts on Augar noting that the big challenge now lay in being able to mesh the activities of FE and HE into a coherent future strategy
- [Russell Group on Augar](#). The Russell Group of universities outlined their thoughts on the Augar report underlining the importance in their view of three principles: sustainable future funding; fairness for students; and supporting a full range of subjects
- [Life after Augar](#). Professor Sir Chris Husbands, V.C. at Sheffield Hallam, offered his thoughts on the Augar report, pointing to some of the challenges generated in the report for universities and in particular the need to recapture public support for how the sector delivers in an age of individual fees



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- **Supporting mental health.** The Office for Students (OfS) outlined the ten funded projects being launched to help tackle the rise in student mental health issues
- **Sins of admission.** The Policy Exchange think tank called for universities to be clearer about their admissions policies and in particular stop the routine use of unconditional offers and move to a system of post-qualification admissions in a new report based on witness evidence
- **Oxford admissions.** Oxford University published its second annual undergraduate admissions report, in this case covering its 2018 intake, showing an increase in state school and BME admissions within a more competitive environment along with a recognition of the need to move faster in this area

FE/Skills

- **AoC on Augar.** David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC,) argued in a comment piece for Wonkhe that the recent Augar report had the potential to be a game-changer for FE but that the issue was that the tertiary sector as a whole, not just a part of it, needed proper investment
- **'NexT Level.'** The government launched its branding package to be used with the first wave of T level students
- **Consultation matters.** Ofqual published its response to the initial government consultation on L3 and below qualifications due to close on Monday, highlighting among other things the important role played by Applied General qualifications such as BTECs

Schools

- **EdTech Fund Launch.** The EdTech Leadership Group held its inaugural meeting where in collaboration with Nesta, it helped launch the EdTech Innovation Fund which will see organisations bid for funds to develop digital tools to help schools and colleges in areas like timetabling and formative assessment
- **Scaled scores.** The Standards and Testing Agency set out the scaled scores needed to reach the expected standard in this year's Key Stage 1 tests
- **ONE Up.** The government invited applications through the Opportunity North East (ONE) Strategic Board to test out approaches for strengthening arrangements for pupils in the North East, particularly the disadvantaged, transitioning from KS2 to KS3
- **Anti-knife crime lessons.** The Personal and Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Association and the Home Office started to dispatch the classroom materials on knife crime they have been working on together to try and help deter knife crime ahead of the summer holidays
- **Mental Health Awareness Training.** The Anna Freud Centre confirmed the next phase of its mental health awareness training which will be rolled out in over 1,800 schools and colleges this autumn as part of a government-funded programme to ensure that at least two members of staff in each school have been trained
- **Dear leadership hopefuls.** The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) wrote to the Tory Party leadership hopefuls outlining three areas (funding, teacher recruitment and retention, and school accountability) which it was hoped they might consider in their manifesto plans
- **EBacc or not?** FFT Education Datalab looked at some of the trends around EBacc subjects and whether the EBacc concept was helping increase the take-up of a core group of subjects or not, suggesting that the wider accountability system was driving most behaviours



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Tweets(s) of the week.

- “This battle for PM is the best thing to happen to education! Everyone is promising schools money! Hurrah” - [@Miss_Snuffy](#)
- “Three-year spending review in autumn ‘unlikely’, says Liz Truss. Potentially another block on implementing Augar recommendations, which require a longer-term Treasury commitment to extra spending” - [@JMorganTHE](#)
- “Oh my God. We have INSET on the 21st. Head teacher just announced we can go to @EducationFest on that day. HOW GREAT IS MY SCHOOL” - [@mariarosevogler](#)
- “What is the most cliched/ridiculous/horrible task you were assigned when you were on work experience? Mine was being sent to pick up the features editors dry cleaning when I was at a major women’s mag - and being *genuinely* excited at the opportunity to “prove myself” - [@kt_grant](#)
- “Fun fact. According to my quick calculation references to the word ‘knowledge’ in the new @Ofstednews handbook are up by 197%, compared to its predecessor. A very crude analysis but I thought it interesting and encouraging - symbolically if nothing else” - [@steverollett](#)

Other stories of the week

- Learning in 2070. To celebrate its 50th anniversary, the Open University invited a few leading experts to look at what learning might look like in another 50 years. Their musings, which include extensive sensory learning and the concept of self-hacking, can be found [here](#)
- Coffee break. Coffee drinkers have been celebrating another one of those research reports this week that seems to debunk an earlier negative finding, in this case whether drinking a lot of coffee is bad for your arteries or not. According to research conducted by Queen Mary University London, it isn’t and you can drink as many as 25 cups a day, although perhaps sleeping might become an issue. The story can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “The review panel discovered that technical and further education were in even worse shape than any of us had realised” – Panel member Professor Alison Wolf reflects on the Augar review
- “One student’s gain must not come at another’s expense” – former Universities Minister David Willetts argues in response to the Augar report that improving opportunities for the 50% who don’t go to university shouldn’t come at the expense of those who do
- “If Ministers choose not to implement Augar, it could not accurately be described as a u-turn, because they received the report rather than accepted it” – the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) reflects on whether the recent Augar report will ever be acted on
- “While some rationalisation is desirable...employers will always need a range of qualifications that cater for the breadth of their occupational roles” – Ofqual highlights the importance of choice in its response to the L3 and below consultation
- “If you really want to screw up the world, then you close your libraries tomorrow.” Big Issue founder John Bird launches a new magazine to help tackle illiteracy



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Number(s) of the week

- £1bn. How much additional funding Michael Gove is pledging for schools as part of his bid for leadership of the Conservative Party
- 58%. How many firms in a survey reckoned they'll need significantly more digital skills in the next five years, according to a new report from the CBI and Tata Consultancy
- £14.5m. How much is being made available to support a range of projects to tackle student mental health issues, according to a new notice from the Office for Students (OfS)
- £4.6m. How much is being made available to support the first stage of activity under the EdTech Innovation Fund programme
- 19. The compulsory 'school' leaving age being proposed in Finland, up from 17, as proposed by the new Social Democrat leader of the country

What to look out for next week

- Start of multiplication tables checks pilot in primary (Monday onwards)
- Lords Science and Technology Committee Inquiry into Science Research funding (Tuesday)
- HEPI Annual Conference and launch of annual student academic survey (Thursday)
- Sixth Form Colleges Association Summer Conference (Thursday, Friday)