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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 17 May 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.

It's been quite a week.

The exams season including SATs got under way, major events from [Love Our Colleges Week](#) to [National Numeracy Day](#) showcased, Ofsted [reported](#) on its revised inspection framework, the Education Policy Institute published a new [report](#) on 16-19 funding and the AoC published a [report](#) of its own on funding, the government [announced](#) its plans for piloting Reception Baseline Assessment this September, the Universities Minister [explained](#) why UKHE would remain open for business Brexit or no, and the Association of Colleges launched a new Mental Health and Wellbeing [charter](#) as part of Mental Health Awareness Week

Quite a list so here's some detail on three of those starting with the revised Ofsted inspection framework.

Consultation on this which attracted a huge response closed last month and this week Ofsted [set out](#) how things now stand. In truth, not a lot has changed from the original proposals. The unpopular on-site preparation proposals have gone in favour of a 90-minute phone call, the EBacc has been played down a little, high needs has been added to the list of reported areas for FE, and institutions will get more time to modify their curriculum, before the 'intent' behind the quality of education is scrutinised. As the Chief Inspector put it, hopefully the dreaded Ofsted call will not now seem so dreaded.

There are of course still concerns, such as whether Ofsted will have the resources and capacity to carry out detailed dives into the curriculum. And the 4-point grading scale, which rankles with some, remains. But many feel that the focus on the quality of education is a step in the right direction and like the deputy editor of the TES, are prepared to suspend reservations. The new system kicks in from this September.

Next 16-19 funding and an important [report](#), commissioned by Pearson, from the Education Policy Institute (EPI.) It's one of a series of reports the EPI is producing ahead of the possible Spending Review and is important for three reasons. Firstly, because it focuses on an overlooked stage of learning yet one critical to life chances for many young people. Second, because funding here has been squeezed more tightly than elsewhere, down 16% on a per student basis since 2010 according to the EPI. And third because the effect of all this has meant that choices and opportunities have been restricted just when they're needed most.

Third, the Universities Minister's [speech](#) at this week's 'Going Global' conference, a key moment for setting out UK thinking on HE life beyond Brexit and where the Minister outlined his vision based on four principles. These included strengthening the UK's role on the global stage, supporting global partnerships, helping UK students to engage globally and keeping the door open for international students. A hopeful vision at last.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Sixth form and college funding down 16% since 2010.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Any mention of exams raises pressure.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'DfE ministers at loggerheads over minimum A' levels for university.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'UK economy risks losing £3.3bn without FE funding boost.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'First college set to go into insolvency.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Minimum wage boost](#). Jeremy Corbyn promised that under a future Labour government, workers aged under 18 who currently are entitled to £4.35 an hour would receive the full national minimum wage of £10 an hour
- [Crisis cohort](#). The Resolution Foundation reported on the so-called 'scarring' effects of those who entered the labour market during the 2008/9 crash where many had to 'trade down' to lower paid jobs with few opportunities and limited wage progression
- [Tackling inequality](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) announced the formal launch of its major project, to be headed by Professor Sir Angus Deaton, to be undertaken over the next few years, looking into the effects of inequality in different aspects of life in the UK
- [How numerate is the UK?](#) National Numeracy along with King's College published the latest Ipsos MORI survey on adult numeracy as part of National Numeracy Day showing levels of numeracy low by international standards and with mixed views about how deep an issue this was
- [Labour Market Outlook](#). The CIPD and Adecco published its Labour Market Outlook for Spring 2019 pointing to continued growth in employment but a continuing flat picture for wages apart from for new starters and some key staff
- [The Changing Nature of R/D](#). The CBI urged the government to set out a clear plan of action and support for how it intended to get to its proposed target of investing 2.4% of GDP in R/D by 2027 given the current figure is around 1.69%

HE

- [Going Global](#). The Universities Minister, Chris Skidmore, spoke at the Going Global conference where he was keen to stress that whatever happened with Brexit, the UK would remain open when it came to higher ed and outlined four principles, such as continuing international partnerships, to demonstrate this
- [Research funding](#). The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee launched a short inquiry into the future of research funding for universities in England and Wales given concerns about potential impact from the forthcoming post-18 review, Brexit and other developments
- [Warwick scholars](#). Warwick University announced a new scheme to help disadvantaged young people in the Midlands who have the potential to study at Warwick by preparing to reduce its standard offer by up to four grades along with a fee discount and ongoing support package



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- **Local Opportunities.** The Office for Students listed the 15 universities due to receive funding under the Challenge Competition scheme intended to help graduates seek employment close to home
- **Access to HE.** The Access to HE team issued figures based on 2017/18 data, showing how successful such students had been in achieving university places let alone top degrees
- **Redesigning the student loan statement.** The Russell Group and MoneySavingExpert reported on their work on redesigning the current student loan statement so that it was more accurate and helpful and contained clearer details on repayment and other costs

FE/Skills

- **16-19 funding.** The Education Policy Institute published a new report, commissioned by Pearson, revealing just how much funding levels had fallen for 16-19 learning over the last decade or so and how far this was restricting what was being provided, putting institutions under enormous pressure
- **Skills shortages and funding gaps.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) reported on what funding was needed needed if the government wanted to close skill gaps and meet employer needs, suggesting that programme weightings for STEM programmes needed reviewing and an uplift of £1,000 to the 16-19 base rate was needed to be able to deliver T level programmes
- **Dear Minister.** A group of employers wrote a recently released open letter to government on the apprenticeship levy, calling for an extension to the deadline for spending levy funds and for greater flexibility in how the levy was used to support local growth
- **Ofsted inspections.** Ofsted reported on its recent consultation proposals confirming they'll go ahead from this September, with high needs now listed as a separate graded area, short inspections continuing and a new focus on the quality of education provided
- **Developing transition.** The Education and Skills Agency (ESFA) confirmed that the Association of Colleges (AoC) with The Challenge Network have been tasked with helping develop the transition framework for T levels, aiming to align development to fit with the phased implementation schedule
- **Apprenticeship support.** The Education and Skills Agency (ESFA) announced that non-levy employers, generally small and medium businesses, would be granted access over time to the full benefits of the apprenticeship service to help them better manage their funding and provision
- **T level CPD.** The Education and Training Foundation announced that online modules that provide professional development for staff supporting the introduction of T levels will be available from next month with face-to-face events available from September
- **A Charter for mental health and wellbeing.** The Association of Colleges (AoC) launched an 11-point charter on mental health for staff and students with commitments on providing staff training, targeted support and regular monitoring and review
- **Digital Functional Skills.** The government launched an 8-week consultation on the subject content for the new digital skill qualifications intended to be available from 2021

Schools

- **Ofsted inspections.** Ofsted reported on its recent consultation confirming that it'll go ahead with its revised arrangements from this September with an emphasis on the quality of education and the same 4-point reporting scale but with proposals for an on-site preparation meeting dropped



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- **Baseline assessment.** The government confirmed details and arrangements for the piloting of the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) in many primary schools in England this September, prior to it being rolled out from Sept 2020
- **Testing, testing.** Researchers from King's College London published new research suggesting that teacher assessments can be just as reliable as formal tests, raising questions about the need for an extensive high-stakes test culture as in the UK
- **Exam guide.** Ofqual published a guide for students taking GCSEs, AS and A' levels in England this summer listing key information about how the exam system operates and who to speak to if need be
- **Language exams.** Ofqual responded to a media story over the previous weekend about language exams being in decline saying it was aware of concerns and was hoping to produce its own research report this autumn

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "#NationalNumeracyDay I hated maths at school- ughh what's the point? - but turns out I actually have had to use it in every role I have ever done from giving medication to clients, marketing strategies, working out budgets and even shopping!" -@Jannemarie76
- "Inequality in the UK is so bad that Britain is second only to the US among major economies" -@FinancialTimes
- "I think there is a place for unconditional offers, especially where universities want to target disadvantaged students... conditional, unconditional offers... I don't think [are] fair on students" says @CSkidmoreUK @educationgovuk" -@CommonsEd
- ""Researchers found teacher assessments accurately reflected the ability of their pupils in later exams"....glad this is now proven, but sort of ridiculous for teachers that it has to be..." -@StaufenbergJ
- "By the time you've finished your next cup of coffee, you'll forget half of what you just learned" -@pluralsight

Other stories of the week

- 'Cos we're happy. In a new report this week, the Office for National statistics (ONS) looked at what makes us happy pointing to three perhaps obvious but important factors: health, wealth and marital status, almost in that order although marital status appears more important in certain age groups such as the elderly. Broadly, based on those three factors in particular, life satisfaction tends to be S-shaped: high for those in their 20's, dropping for those in their 40's, rising for those in their 60's and falling again for those in their 80's. A link to the report is [here](#)
- Working from home. It's less accessible for teachers and other public sector workers but working at home is by all accounts on the rise and this week, there's even been a National Work from Home Day. According to the TUC, some 1.6m people in the UK now work from home, up nearly 250,000 over the last decade. Most are managers aged over 40, generally male and with the largest proportion based in the South West of the country. The Independent has been one of a number of media outlets that have carried the story this week, see link [here](#)



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Quote(s) of the week

- “I want to send the message loud and clear that, when it comes to higher education and research, the UK is most certainly open” – the HE Minister tells a global audience the UK’s HE door will remain open
- “The majority of UK workers are long overdue a meaningful pay rise” – the CIPD and Adecco report on their latest Labour Market Outlook
- “The Levy has helped thousands of people enter the labour market and improve the skills base of those already in work, but the reforms have not been as seamless as many of us would like” – employers pen an open letter to government calling for reforms to the apprenticeship levy
- “Despite the fact that this phase of education is obviously vital to the life chances of young people, sixth forms and colleges have been starved of the funding they need and the students deserve” – ASCL’s Geoff Barton comments on the EPI’s latest report on 16-19 funding
- “I hope my reforms will mitigate fear of THE Ofsted call” – Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman aims to lower the pressure with the reformed Ofsted inspection framework
- “I can safely say there is no hand-wringing, no panic, no woe” – the Headmaster of Whitgift School confirms in a blog on the HEPI site that independent schools don’t feel they’re being marginalised when it comes to getting their students into leading universities
- “By using a variety of short, practical tasks in a familiar environment, the children should not be aware that they are sitting an assessment” – the government seeks to re-assure over the new assessment at the reception stage
- “If you are used to shouting out to be heard, no one has ever taught you how to wait your turn or share, you’re not going to change suddenly in a classroom” – the government’s adviser on pupil behaviour on working with children from different backgrounds

Number(s) of the week

- 80%. How many employees in a survey said they wouldn’t be happy to discuss mental health issues with their manager preferring in some cases a colleague, according to a survey to mark Mental Health Awareness Week by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
- 23%. How many employers reported that they were hiring more apprentices, according to the latest Labour Market Outlook from CIPD and Adecco
- 31%. How many people in a survey, particularly women, reckoned they were not ‘a numbers person,’ according to an Ipsos MORI poll conducted for National Numeracy Day
- 139,000 and 16,000. How many EU domiciled students were studying in the UK and UK studying a full course in an EU country in 2017/18, according to latest figures given in a Parliamentary Answer
- 16%. How much funding per student has fallen for 16-19 year olds since 2010, according to a new report from the Education Policy Institute
- 70+. How many school sixth forms are believed to have closed because of funding pressures, according to a report in the TES
- 15,000+. How many responses Ofsted received to its recent consultation on revising the inspection framework, according to its response report



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- 36%. How many parents reported that their teenage children were losing sleep because of worry over exams, according to a survey on exam stress for Mumsnet
- 1465. How many children in the UK were securely detained in youth justice settings, mental health wards and so on in England in 2018, according to a new report by the Children's Commissioner for England

What to look out for next week

- Westminster Hall debate on the International Education Strategy (Wednesday)
- European elections (Thursday)