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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 1 November 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.

The general election has obviously dominated headlines this week with education likely to feature as a key policy area. It's remained consistently high up the list of voter concerns in recent polls, it's an area Opposition Parties have been busy working on in recent months and it's a sector that the government has showered with funds recently as a demonstration of their commitment. The Education Secretary's [Written Statement](#) to Parliament this week, outlining key achievements by the DfE since 2010 offers further proof that the government remains keen to hold the ring in this area.

More on all this in a minute but let's start by tidying up this week's education developments.

Higher education first where the Minister hosted a roundtable on student accommodation and the Office for Students issued a series of reports. The most significant of these perhaps [looked at](#) how the first year of the new registration process for HE providers had gone, pointing to what appears to have been some uncomfortable discussions with providers.

In FE/skills, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) has been in conference and it's also been a full week for reports. The CBI and Learning and Work Institute reported on [lifelong learning](#) and the case for [apprenticeship levy reform](#) respectively while the Industrial Strategy Council published a landmark report on future UK skills mismatches. A summary of the report by Council Chair Andy Haldane can be found [here](#). As he concluded: "vocational training, long the collapsed left lung of the UK's educational system, needs to be urgently resuscitated."

For schools, the government has [invited](#) bids to help with school facilities improvement, the Education Policy Institute published the second [report](#) in its series on school expenditure looking at which type of school spends most, and a commissioned report for the Northern Powerhouse [highlighted](#) the importance of contextual matters when it comes to considering school performance.

And so back to the election where the importance or otherwise of the student vote has been under considerable discussion this week with both [the BBC](#) and [HE Policy Institute](#) offering their thoughts. A lot seems to depend on where students will be on the day given university terms across the UK are so different. As to how students might vote, the latest [YouthSight poll of students](#) has Labour ahead in terms of student choice though not with the same level of enthusiasm as before. As for early pitches, the [Russell Group](#) has been quickly off the mark with a wish list for a future government that includes maintaining per student funding levels and retaining close relationships with EU partners. It's all up and running.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Schools with richest intakes get double extra funding.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Apprenticeship funding: 4 options to fix the system.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Unconditional offer students more likely to drop out.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Make masters compulsory for teachers, say universities.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Hundreds of schools face nativity play disruption for December election.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Election debate](#). The Prime Minister outlined the case for a December general election in the opening debate in the Commons
- [End of term report](#). The Education Secretary reported on the work of the Dept of Education with a five-page spread of 'key achievements' from over the last 9 years ranging from increased support for early years to record numbers of 18 year olds going to university
- [No Budget but](#). The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) announced that despite next week's intended Budget being scrapped, it would issue an updated version of its March forecasts next week with for example the new accounting arrangements for student loans now incorporated
- [Ethical AI](#). The RSA reported on its Forum for Ethical AI where a citizen's jury had met to consider issues around the use of automated decision systems (ADS) calling among other things for data to be anonymised and procedures subject to accountability as a guide to future use

HE

- [The student vote](#). Nick Hillman, director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) looked at the importance of the student vote in elections, noting that for it to make a difference a number of factors have to come into play such as actually being registered and turning out to vote
- [More on the student vote](#). BBC Education correspondent Sean Coughlan also examined the importance of the student vote noting among other things how the date could prove critical with students finishing at different times for Christmas and thereby potentially on the move on polling day
- [How might students vote?](#) The polling organization YouthSight reported on its recent survey among students on voting intentions with Labour still in front though not as popular as before and the Lib-Dems coming in second
- [What do we want?](#) The Russell Group issued an early wish list for political Party election manifestos calling among other things for a future government to retain a close relationship with EU partners, have a clear plan on how to raise investment of GDP on R/D to 3%, and maintain per student funding levels
- [OfS registration](#). The Office for students (OfS) reported on how the first year of operating a new registration process for all HE providers had gone, highlighting the large number of challenges, checks and regulatory interventions it had had to make as part of the process



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- **Unconditional offers.** The Office for Students updated its work on unconditional offers, adding data from the 2018 cycle to its earlier 2012-2017 figures and underlining that the number of unconditional offers has continued to grow with no improvement to continuation rates
- **Unibuddy.** UCAS announced that it had teamed up with the online platform Unibuddy to help providers connect with students, both current and prospective, who may not be able to visit on Open Days or who live abroad and want to know more about a particular university and what it offers
- **Outreach work.** The Office for Students (OfS) reported on commissioned work looking into the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) finding a scheme that is helping reach students and parents though with more work needed on understanding fee issues and career routes
- **Brexit guidance.** The government issued further guidance on fees and settlement for EU students in the UK in the light of both a deal and a no-deal

FE/Skills

- **UK Skills Mismatch in 2030.** The Industrial Strategy Council reported on the extent of possible skills mismatches in the UK over the next decade suggesting that this was likely to prove a major challenge pointing particularly to an urgent need for skills training in areas like digi skills, management and personal skills
- **UTCs.** The National Audit Office (NAO) published a new report into University Technical Colleges (UTCs) painting a pretty bleak picture of closures and poor performers although recognizing some of the challenges in terms of remit and position that they face
- **Levy funding.** The Learning and Work Institute published a new report on the apprenticeship levy highlighting in particular the detrimental effect of any overspend on SMEs and calling among other things for some top-up funding and for 16 – 18 apprenticeship funding to shift to the overall education budget
- **An upskill battle.** The CBI launched a new report on the importance of lifelong learning and some of the challenges that lie behind this calling particularly for greater use to be made of the National Retraining Scheme with funding included for L2 and 3 qualifications and more informal training to support future skills
- **Improving skills devolution.** The Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) published the results of a survey into how best to improve future procurements of the devolved adult education budget with recommendations for greater transparency, probity and consistency

Schools

- **Schools and the election.** Ed Dorrell, deputy editor at the TES started to flesh out some of the details that might be in a Conservative manifesto for schools with an assisted places scheme and support for grammar schools both strong possibilities
- **Building conditions.** The government announced it was open to bids from schools and sixth form colleges that meet specific criteria on quality and salary limits for a share of around £400m to help with school facilities improvement under the Condition Improvement Fund
- **Schools Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill.** A Private Members Bill to provide for schools to promote the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils started its legislative process through the House of Lords



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- **School spending.** The Education Policy Institute, in the second in a series of papers on school spending, looked into which type of school was spending the most suggesting it was schools with high numbers of disadvantaged pupils particularly in London
- **Contextualising school performance.** The Northern Powerhouse Partnership highlighted the importance of taking into account contextual factors such as gender, ethnicity and free school meal status when compiling Progress 8 in a report undertaken by Bristol University, suggesting that if such factors were acknowledged a fifth of schools would see their rankings improve by more than 500 places
- **Career Hubs.** The Careers and Enterprise Company reported on the work of Career Hubs which bring together schools and colleges with local employers and organisations offering careers support, suggesting that they were developing well and that more were being launched
- **Careers support.** The Local Government Association (LGA) called on the government to devolve responsibility for careers advice and skills schemes to local councils not least to ensure a more uniform service

Tweets(s) of the week.

- “One in five universities could run out of money and have been placed on an enhanced monitoring list warns regulator” - [@SianGriffiths6](#)
- “We still read to our ten year old. He’s perfectly capable of reading books himself but it’s a great bonding time before bedtime” - [@TrudieTweedie](#)
- “MPs warn of nativity crisis and ‘cancelled Christmas decorations’ as a result of a December election” - [@SchoolsWeek](#)
- “There should be a teacher dating app where you can just meet single teachers in the area and you can spend your evenings marking and no-one judges you for bringing your work home” - [@c_caio_mfl](#)
- “The girls have their school photo today and there is an option to AIRBRUSH the picture! There are two levels offered!! What the....?! Have complained! What 8 yr old needs to be paranoid about an “uneven skin tone” - [@WalkerSam](#)

Other stories of the week

- Education and the election. Although Brexit remains as the top concern facing the country according to polls of voters, education has consistently featured in the top ten list of voter concerns over recent years. In the latest chart from YouGov, published just last week, education came in at number five, behind Brexit, health/NHS, the economy, and the environment in that order. All of which suggests it will feature as a prominent topic in the election campaign. A link to the YouGov chart can be found [here](#)
- That narcissism report. Away from the election, there’s been considerable interest in some new research out this week from Queen’s University Belfast looking into narcissism. Its perhaps surprising conclusion, or at least the aspect that captured attention, was that narcissistic traits may not be all bad. In the words of the researcher, they can ‘correlate with components of mental toughness, such as confidence and goal orientation, protecting against symptoms of depression and perceived stress.’ The research can be found [here](#)



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Quote(s) of the week

- “This idea of purity and you’re never compromised and you’re politically woke and all that stuff – you should get over that quickly” – former President Obama upbraids young people for falling in too quickly with the current culture wars climate
- “Students can pay significant amounts for their accommodation and it is unacceptable to let them down at a stressful time” – the Universities Minister hosts a summit of student accommodation providers
- “Some providers were able to demonstrate compliance with ease; others found this challenging” – the Office for Students reports on the first year of a new registration process
- “What is clear is that apprenticeships look much different now, with growth in higher and degree-level apprenticeships which tend to cost more” – the Learning and Work Institute dig into some of the issues around apprenticeship funding
- “This report provides further evidence as to why the Dept for Education is my top department of concern” – Meg Hillier MP, chair of the Public Accounts Committee reflects on concerns raised in the NAO report on UTCs
- “The school funding system is broadly progressive” – the Education Policy Institute issues a further report on school expenditure

Number(s) of the week

- 78%. The number of people in a survey who said that the government should invest more in apprenticeships and technical courses for young people compared to 22% who said they should cut the cost of student loans, according to new research from the think tank Onward
- 387. How many higher education providers (out of a total of 500+) have been accepted on to the Office for Students (OfS) register of providers, according to a new report from the OfS
- £400m. How much the government is offering for school and sixth form college estate improvements, according to an announcement by the Education Secretary
- 32. How many staff are working in the DfE’s Behaviour, Attendance, Exclusion and Alternative Provision Division of the DfE which is leading on many of the Timpson review proposals, according to an answer in Parliament by Nick Gibb this week
- 399,50. The number of children defined as being in need as of March 31 2019, down 1% on the previous year, according to the latest government statistics
- 50%. The rise in the number of people working freelance in the gig economy since 2001, according to a survey from CAPX

What to look out for next week

- Wonkhe’s Wonkfest (Monday/Tuesday)
- IfS event on HE funding (Tuesday)