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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 29 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 launch of the [Conservative Party manifesto](#) last weekend rounded off the medley of big party manifestos for the 2019 general election. It included a number of announcements on education and skills so let's start with what this latest manifesto had to say on such matters.

The headline message was confirmation of the pre-announced 'levelling up' of schools funding, a total of £7.1bn in cash terms by 2022/23. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) [put it](#): 'enough to reverse recent cuts but still leave per pupil spending no higher in 2022/23 than it was 13 years earlier.'

The Conservative's other big announcement was the creation of a £3bn National Skills Fund over the lifetime of the next Parliament. There's some uncertainty about how this fits with the National Retraining Scheme but the manifesto promised 'to consult widely on the overall design.' Elsewhere, the Conservatives promise to introduce an Arts Premium in secondary school, 'improve the working' of the apprenticeship levy, and 'consider' Augar. There were omissions; nothing on T levels as Tom Richmond in the TES [pointed out](#), little on accountability, workloads, higher level tech education and so on, leaving arguably a fairly modest set of proposals.

All three main party manifestos are now however out, so what conclusions do we draw?

First, that as the National Education Union (NEU) reminded us in a [poll](#) of parents this week, education remains high in the list of voter concerns as the manifestos reflect. School funding was credited with swinging many votes in the 2017 election, hence perhaps the emphasis on it this time round. There's been a bit of a shift this time to perhaps wider issues such as mental health support and alternative provision but ultimately education in the broadest sense matters. Second, sadly many of the more intractable problems in education, such as how best to help the 'forgotten 30%' who fail to secure baseline qualifications, remain. The big challenge as the National Institute of Economic and Social Research reminds us in its [summary](#), is 'what can be done to make the education system more effective and fairer?' It's a question that manifestos are still some way from answering. And third, as Stephen Exley in the TES [highlighted](#): there may be plenty of manifesto proposals but where's the vision?

In other news this week, National Numeracy [reported](#) on continuing concerns about basic adult numeracy, twenty years on from the landmark Moser report, the Conservatives [announced](#) plans to beef up inspections, UCAS issued its first [report](#) on this year's admissions cycle and the CBI and Pearson are [launching](#) their latest Employer Skills Survey. Some gritty stuff all round.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Galling £111m arts premium is too little too late.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Poor maths skills cost the economy £388m a week.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Education becomes third most important election issue for parents.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Half of students get degree place with lower grades.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Conservatives pledge to boost Ofsted rather than scrap it.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Conservative Party manifesto](#). The Conservatives published their 2019 election manifesto with six guarantees from Boris Johnson on the inside page including committed funding for science, schools and apprenticeships and a focus on getting Brexit done and 'unleashing future potential'
- [Costings document](#). The Conservatives published a small accompanying document setting out their various manifesto spending commitments including those announced in the recent spending round
- [Race and Faith manifesto](#). Labour released a manifesto 'addendum' dedicated to tackling issues of race and faith, listing a number of proposals including reviewing the coverage of history in the curriculum and assessing the impact of spending announcements on BAME communities
- [Education and the Election](#). The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) with support from Nuffield examined the various party manifestos on education, outlining six issues that remain priorities
- [Regional inequality](#). The IPPR think tank highlighted what it called 'a geography of discontent' as it examined regional inequality in its 'State of the North 2019' report, arguing that the UK still suffers from greater regional divisions than other comparable economies and calling for greater devolution as a consequence
- [Saving the web](#). Sir Tim Berners-Lee launched a new global contract, worked up by representatives from over 80 organisations, setting out nine core principles designed to safeguard the web from misappropriation and abuse in the future

HE

- [Bring back maintenance grants](#). Leading education bodies including the NUS, AoC and Universities UK called for inflation proof maintenance grants to be restored and extended to cover all L 4-6 provision
- [A manifesto for 21st c universities](#). The University of Lincoln's 21st c Lab published its report on the university model of the future, proposing a permeable institution with multifaceted governance, balanced regulation and a responsive approach to learning and research
- [Manifesto lines](#). The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) summarized HE policies from the three main parties in a colourful chart
- [Manifesto thoughts](#). Wonkhe offered its thoughts on the HE policies emanating from the three main parties, finding little to get enthused about



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- **This year's university entry.** UCAS published the first of what is now a series of data releases on this year's entry to university, in this case highlighting entry trends through Clearing and from disadvantaged areas and pointing out that students have more chance than ever of receiving an offer
- **Chill winds.** Nick Hillman, director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) reflected on the current state of UKHE in the light of a number of uncertainties surrounding it from the election to Brexit and funding uncertainties
- **How are we doing?** The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published a brief inaugural annual report spelling out the work it's been doing as it prepares to reach its 18th birthday next year and plan for a bigger future

FE/Skills

- **Basic numbers.** The charity National Numeracy along with the global firm TP ICAP published a new report on adult basic numeracy skills, pointing to a lack of progress in meeting targets set in the seminal Moser report 20 years ago and highlighting some of the impact on individuals and the country as a result
- **Devolving adult education.** The Collab Group of colleges raised some concerns about devolved funding for adult education in England in a new report, raising questions as to whether system capacity is sufficient, there'll be too much bureaucracy and a two tier system might ultimately emerge
- **Those left behind.** LSE's Centre for Economic Performance highlighted the issue of the 30%+ of young people needing the skills and support to progress, arguing that UK policy in this area is notably weak and that there's very little coming out of the election so far to help this group
- **NEET concerns.** The Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER) reported on the issue of young people in England not in education, employment or training, noting that while things may have improved for the younger age group, for many others particularly in less affluent areas, attainment gaps are much more prominent
- **5 priorities for FE.** Professor Ewan Keep, Director of SKOPE (Centre for Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance) at Oxford University, offered his thoughts on the key FE and skills issues facing an incoming Minister pointing to apprenticeship funding, employer training, T levels and system changes as heading the list

Schools

- **Boosting Ofsted.** The Conservatives set out plans, in contrast to other political parties, to boost Ofsted with proposals to pilot no-notice inspections, increase the length of some inspections and ensure that outstanding schools are subject to routine inspections
- **Coping with inspections.** The National Education Union set out what should be expected of teachers during inspections, citing evidence of an increased burden resulting from the new inspection framework particularly for those in small primary schools and/or without leadership responsibility
- **Ask the parents.** The National Education Union published the results of a recent poll of parents of school-age children conducted by Deltapoll, showing that many regard education as one of their top concerns
- **Retaining Science, Maths and Computing teachers.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reported on its work for the Royal Society on retaining science, maths and computing teachers given they have a higher rate of leaving than other teachers, suggesting that low pay and low self-efficacy are often contributory factors



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Tweets(s) of the week.

- “Every now and again I recall the careers questionnaire they made us do at school and the kid in my tutor group who, after ticking 50 boxes or whatever, got the suggestion ‘Council fence erector’” - [@MrRayNewman](#)
- “Students don’t complain about your striking lecturers – join them” - [@GuardianEdu](#)
- “I had a student ask me when are you going to start teaching me? I’m just teaching myself” - [@Phil_Baty](#)
- “What’s your most trivial gripe that still never fails to irk? Mine is people using uni for university. I will die on this hill” - [@smitajamdar](#)
- “Why on earth do people preface their presentations with ‘as you all know? Well, if we do know why are you doing the presentation? If you don’t why do you want me to feel stupid?’” - [@karmel80](#)

Other stories of the week

- The UK universities that have produced the most millionaires. In another one of those constant surveys on university ‘performance,’ the Daily Telegraph last week reported on new data from the financial technology company Tide showing which UK universities had produced the most millionaires. Some of the names on the list are pretty obvious, others perhaps less so. Here’s a [link](#) to the story

Quote(s) of the week

- “And that is the vision we are offering – to make this country the greatest place to live, to breathe, to be, to raise kids, to start a business” – Boris Johnson launches the Conservative Party manifesto
- “A Conservative government will back Ofsted with more funding to carry out better and more focused inspections so that parents have more reliable information about their child’s school, and school standards are driven up across the country” – Gavin Williamson outlines clear political dividing lines on the future of Ofsted
- “Respect and protect people’s fundamental online privacy and data rights” – one of the nine principles for safeguarding the web as part of a new global contract
- “Permeability is the new lens which should reframe the purpose of universities in the 21st century” – the University of Lincoln helps ‘reframe’ the university of the future
- “The bottom third of the cohort languish within the education system and later on” – the LSE’s Centre for Economic Performance highlights the plight of the ‘forgotten’ 30% of young people, once again seemingly ignored in manifesto commitments

Number(s) of the week

- £1.8bn. How much the Conservatives are promising to invest in upgrading the FE estate over the next five years, according to their manifesto costings document
- 97.8%. How many 18 year olds in the UK applying through UCAS received at least one offer this year, according to new data from UCAS

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- 2.2M. The latest picture on apprenticeship starts, so still some way off the official 3m target, according to the latest government figures
- £388m. How much poor levels of adult numeracy cost the UK economy on a weekly basis, according to a new report from National Numeracy and TP ICAP

What to look out for next week

- Launch of the 2018 PISA test results followed by 2 day discussion on the future of Education (Tuesday)