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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 13 September 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.

Parliament may have been stood down but the world of education is as busy as ever.

The week's big announcements first where two stand out. First, [the announcement](#) from the Prime Minister that the government intends to inject new momentum into the Free School movement. It came as the DfE launched its latest wave of applications, looking to create a further 30 'in areas with the lowest educational standards.' It's something that the PM had pledged during the leadership contest as he explained perched rather awkwardly on a classroom chair in a visit to a local primary school later to explain the details.

The [second announcement](#) was about the government's intention to extend the visa for international graduates from four months to two years. It's a move welcomed by many, the Russell Group for instance called it 'fantastic,' not least because of the more welcoming tone it implies at a time when student skills and recruitment are likely to be in demand.

Next this week's reports which have covered international education systems, exam malpractice, special needs support, an alternative to GCSE English Language, pupil behaviour and reflections on the recent cycle of FE area wide reviews. They contain a lot of important detail so here's just a few pointers.

The report on international education systems is the OECD's [annual extensive trawl](#) of how different member countries' education systems are performing. The HE Policy Institute which hosted this year's report launch has a helpful [summary](#) of the key points for the UK which suggests we fund education quite highly especially at primary, have younger teachers and provide well in early years and higher education. As ever, it's a comprehensive glance and worth looking at the [section](#) on the UK.

Next and on home turf, exam malpractice and a [report](#) from an independent Commission looking into this over the last year. The report came up with a lot of recommendations including notably a blanket ban on taking watches into exam rooms but acknowledged that the system is working well overall and that this is about sensible precautions. Talking of exams, this week also saw the [report](#) from ASCL's Commission on 'the forgotten third,' the 30%+ who fall short in GCSE English and end up taking endless resits, recommending an alternative type of exam altogether, more practical in nature.

Finally, briefly three Ministerial statements. One concerned [changed Ministerial responsibilities](#) at the DfE and two, made before Parliament disassembled, confirmed recent announcements on [funding](#) and the [special needs review](#). Any confirmation of things welcome these days.

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Top headlines this week

- 'State school numbers rise at Cambridge.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Ban all watches from exams to stop cheating.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'UK work visas for foreign graduates to be extended to two years.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Oxford top of global university rankings.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Teachers to get more training in how to deal with naughty children.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Education at a wide glance](#). The OECD published its latest annual report into how education systems in different countries are performing showing the UK to be performing well particularly in early years and tertiary education although with high levels of tuition fees and a teaching force younger than most
- [Take 6](#). The Children's Commissioner for England published a manifesto listing six pledges that could help children such as having a counsellor in every school, for all political parties to consider in the event of a general election

HE

- [Conference speech](#). The Education Secretary addressed the Universities UK Annual Conference where he praised the work of universities, committed to the current international education strategy, urged universities to continue improving access and opportunity and confirmed that responses to the Pearce review and Augar principles would follow in due course
- [Back in harness](#). Chris Skidmore, back in harness as Universities Minister, also addressed the Universities UK annual Conference, where he too commended the work of universities, particularly in science, innovation and research and looked forward to a bright future for the sector
- [Visa extensions](#). The government announced that it would extend the system of visas for international students so that they could remain in the UK for two years after graduation to look for a job
- [Widening access](#). The Office for Students published the latest set of institutional plans for widening access and participation among universities
- [World University rankings](#). The Times Higher published its latest set of global rankings for universities based on measures such as teaching quality, research and international links, with Oxford again in top position and with UK universities featuring strongly, although not quite as high as last year in some cases
- [Horizon scanning](#). Nick Hillman, Director of the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) looked ahead to what issues might dominate HE in the coming months with Augar, Brexit, governance and spending among them
- [Consulting on higher technical education](#). Greg Walker, chief exec of the Million Plus Group of Universities reflected in a blog on the HEPI website about the government's current proposals for higher technical provision suggesting among other things that they risked creating a more bureaucratic system that failed to reflect current good practice



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FE/Skills

- [Report on Area Reviews](#). The government published a summary report on the 2015-2017 area reviews spelling out what impact they'd had on college numbers and sector debt, suggesting that the work had led to new forms of working and disciplines, but that it was too early to prove any long-term benefits
- [Area review case studies](#). The government published a commissioned report into the FE area review process concluding among other things that the emphasis on financial efficiency and the exclusion of some other providers such as school sixth forms had limited the overall effectiveness of the exercise
- [Do FE college mergers work?](#) The government published commissioned research on the impact of college mergers between 1993 and 2018 concluding that these have had little or no effect on subsequent performance
- [16-19 Discretionary Bursaries](#). The government reported on its recent consultation on discretionary bursaries which help disadvantaged 16-19 yr olds with transport and books, confirming that from next year, it would adopt a system more in line with identified needs
- [Data submissions](#). The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) announced that from next year it was moving to a system of annual rather than biannual financial returns from colleges, with those under intervention procedures or in receipt of ESFA loans needing to submit on a more frequent basis
- [Take 9](#). David Hughes, chief executive of the association of Colleges (AoC) outlined in a comment piece in the TES, nine issues, ranging from L3 to adult literacy/numeracy, likely to be of concern to colleges let alone government at the start of another education year
- [Adult learning participation](#). The Learning and Work Institute published the latest in its series of adult surveys highlighting a significant drop in adult participation in learning with the biggest drops in some of the regions where there already was evidence of low participation
- [Upskilling hopes and fears](#). PwC released commissioned survey research showing that while many employees were keen to develop their digital skills, they were often denied the opportunity to do so by their workplace, generating feelings of mistrust

Schools

- [More Free Schools](#). The Prime Minister heralded the launch of the latest wave of applications for Free Schools intended to target areas with low education standards and where there's also a need for more school places and hoping to generate another 30 such schools
- [School funding](#). The government confirmed the funding arrangements for schools and high needs for 2020/21 following last week's Spending Round with allocations due to be announced in the normal way in December and steps towards 'hardening' the national formula included from 2020/21
- [Minimum funding levels](#). The government launched consultation on how best to determine minimum per pupil funding levels as they becomes mandatory through local authority funding formulae as part of the shift to the national funding formula
- [SEND review](#). The Education Secretary confirmed the remit and arrangements for the cross-government special educational needs and disability review, first announced at the end of last week



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- **SEND support.** The National Audit Office published its report into how well students with special educational needs and disabilities are being supported, concluding that the system is under pressure and recommending that the government looks more closely at costs, numbers and provision
- **Exam malpractice.** The independent Commission set up by the Joint Council to look into exam malpractice issued its report, finding a system working well but with the need for some improvements recommending notably a blanket ban on watches in exam rooms and a single definition for malpractice
- **Passport to success.** The Association of School and College Leaders' (ASCL) Commission set up to look into the issue of those students who don't manage to achieve a grade 4 in English, recommended scrapping GCSE English Language in favour of a more practical Passport for English, along where necessary with a similar Passport for Maths
- **Managed behaviour.** Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman reported on the initial stage of the inspectorate's research into how schools are managing challenging behavior, especially now that it is highlighted in the new inspection framework, pointing to a number of principles such as establishing strong routines, that many strong schools now use
- **National Reference Test 2020.** The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER,) the managing agents for the Test, set out the arrangements for next year's version

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "OECD: more women than men graduate from vocational courses" - [@FEontap](#)
- "Pupils forced to make GCSE choices in Year 7" - [@SchoolsImprove](#)
- "Warm-strict is one of the most eminently sensible and common sense ideas in teaching" - [@MrSmithRE](#)
- "Got my ucas sorted, all my finances and a house sorted all within 2 days. All I need to do now is pack my bags and sofa surf for a week" - [@Olliedootdoot](#)
- "More than 600 teachers have signed up to complete five free modules that give them UK accreditation as a climate change teachers" - [@SkyNews](#)
- "Charlotte Church plans to open school in her Dinas Powys home" - [@ed_ontap](#)

Other stories of the week

- As children see it. Last week the survey site Education Quizzes decided to ask schoolchildren what they thought the consequences of Brexit might be. 38% of those surveyed thought that things would cost more, 16% reckoned the Europeans wouldn't like us, 10%, perhaps hopefully, thought there'd be no more need for any language lessons, while 10% believed we'd be out of the Eurovision Song Contest. A link to the survey can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "Lots of things are described as national treasures but our higher education system is genuinely one of them" – the Education Secretary works the audience at the Universities UK Annual Conference



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- “Local authorities will continue to set a Minimum Funding Guarantee in local formulae which in 2020/21 must be between +0.5% and +1.84%” - Nick Gibb spells out some of the implications of the recent spending announcement
- “Apprenticeships have been one of the greatest successes of the government” – the Education Secretary responds to questions from MPs on apprenticeships
- “Educated people throughout history have always argued that there are too many other educated people” – OECD education director Andreas Schleicher on the issue of graduate numbers
- “We will be scrutinizing the progress universities make and will intervene where progress is not sufficient” – the Office for Students reports on the latest set of institutional access plans
- “We find that on average the effect of merging is statistically indistinguishable from zero” – a government commissioned report examines 171 college merges over time and finds they make no difference to performance
- “T levels and applied generals serve two different – but complementary – purposes” two college principals write in the TES in support of BTECs and other vocational qualifications
- “Examinations officers and invigilators are often unable to distinguish between smart and non-smart watches”- the Independent Commission on Exam Malpractice recommends a ban on watches in exams

Number(s) of the week

- 3.8%. Average wage growth for the period May – July, though still down on a decade ago, according to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- 10%. The UK’s share of the total international education market, according to the OECD’s latest Education at a Glance report
- 84%. How many students/recent graduates would recommend university to others as a worthwhile experience, according to a new survey commissioned by UniversitiesUK
- 28. The number of UK universities in the top 200 of the Times Higher world university rankings
- 35%. How many adults have taken part in learning in the last three years, the lowest on record according to the latest adult participation survey from the Learning and Work Institute
- 48. The reduction in the number of colleges following the area review process, down from 241 to 193 according to the summary report from the DfE
- 31%. How many primary school teachers in England are aged 30 or under compared to 13% on average across OECD countries, according to the OECD’s Education at a Glance report
- 14.9%. The number of pupils in England recorded as having special educational needs and disabilities as of the start of this year, according to a report from the National Audit Office

What to look out for next week

- (Pearson supported) Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group in conversation with Sir Vince Cable at Lib-Dem Conference (this Saturday, Bayview Suite 1, 20.15-21.30)
- LKMCo celebration and re-launch event (Tuesday)
- HEPI report on ‘What Students Want from their University Experience’ (Tuesday)

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- Launch of Institute for Fiscal Studies annual Education Spending report (Thursday)
- Labour Party Conference (next Saturday – Wednesday)