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## Policy Eye



### Highlights of week ending Friday 17 January 2020

(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.

One of those weeks, back to the grind with little to excite, policy-wise at least.

It's been busy at least in Parliament where MPs held a lengthy [debate](#) on education as part of the follow-up to the Queen's Speech. The Education Secretary, who opened the debate, ran through many of the current issues including minimum funding levels, school standards, future skills and the Erasmus + international exchange scheme, suggesting that the government 'was poised to shape a new Britain' although Angela Rayner for the Opposition felt a lot 'was missing in action.' What was positive, however, was the number of new MPs keen to participate.

MPs have a further chance to get their teeth into education on Monday when DfE Ministers respond to [Questions](#). Among the 25 questions listed are six on funding, including for FE, four on special needs, with a sprinkling of others on school places, disadvantaged children, international participation post-Brexit, and where we are on the introduction of T levels. So far this year therefore, so standard.

Three other interesting snippets before we leave the Parliamentary portals. First, Boris Johnson is setting up a [cross-Whitehall taskforce](#), which he will chair, to tackle youth gangs and knife crime. Second, the PM confirmed in an answer during [PM's Questions](#) that an announcement on reform of the apprenticeship levy would be made soon. And third, the [Bill](#) providing for schools to promote the mental health and wellbeing of their pupils has been brought back to begin its passage through Parliament.

Away from Westminster, in higher education this week, Oxford University [reported](#) a record increase in the number of offers for undergraduate places made to British state school students as the next big milestone in this year's UCAS application cycle was reached. UCAS's final [reports](#) on the 2019 admissions cycle are due out at the end of this month with some early data on this year's a week later.

In FE/Skills, it's been GCSE English and maths [resit results](#) week, a mixed picture and still an issue for many, while reports on [apprenticeship pay](#) levels and [local skill mismatches](#) have captured headlines.

For schools, ahead of its Annual Report next week, Ofsted had an interesting [piece](#) on its current and future research activity including the return of its subject reviews. In other news, the Education Policy Institute [reported](#) on trends in teacher numbers and salaries, the National Association of Head Teachers [questioned](#) schools admissions arrangements as deadline day for choosing primary places arrived while UK performance in developing those famed wider skills slipped in the latest published [Index](#).



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## Top headlines this week

- 'Ofsted starts subject reviews with maths and languages.' ([Monday](#))
- 'University students paid to tackle racist language on campus.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Sussex University offers students up to £100 for strike distress.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'GCSE resits: English and maths pass rate drops.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Social media data needed for 'harm' research, say doctors.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [Education debate](#). MPs debated education as part of the protracted Queen's Speech debate, taking in many familiar topics including school funding, Free Schools, SEN, future skills, Erasmus and student mobility with the Education Secretary promising a full agenda for the future but little new as yet
- [Pillars of wisdom](#). Rob Halfon MP, previous Chair of the Education Committee, in what is fast becoming a significant mantra, spelt out what he felt should be the four 'S' pillars (skills, standards, social justice, support for the profession) of the government's education agenda in a new article in PoliticsHome
- [Making technology work for all](#). The Culture Secretary, Nicky Morgan, outlined five principles on making sure technology works for all, including government support and shared benefits, in a speech given in support of the Tech Talent Charter
- [Educating for the Future](#). The UK, which came in at 15<sup>th</sup> out of 50 nations, was one of a number of leading economies to drop down the Index for developing future-orientated skills, such as critical thinking and entrepreneurship, as reported by the latest Worldwide Educating for the Future Index
- [Business support](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) looked into some of the business support schemes supported by the BEIS Dept often with help from EU funds to fund areas like Knowledge Transfer and innovation, warning that better evaluation was needed if such funding was to be replaced
- [Work Life balance](#). Working Families and Bright Horizons published their latest Modern Family Index on how working parents manage the balance between work and family life showing that while more employers recognize how important the issue is, the number of parents working flexibly has stalled and modern forms of communication mean work issues often intrude into family life
- [Social impact](#). The innovation foundation Nesta announced the three English arts organisations due to receive impact funding to help them with their work in providing space and support for young people with creative talent

### HE

- [Number crunching](#). The Higher Education Student Statistics Agency (HESA) published the latest set of data on UK HE students for up to 2018/19, showing the latest trends in terms of intake and qualification levels and pointing to a potential slowdown in the number of top degrees awarded
- [Conditional Unconditionals](#). Nottingham Trent University, a University that has made extensive use of the practice, set out its thoughts on unconditional offers in a blog on the Wonkhe website, pointing to



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evidence that showed it had little negative effect either on applicants or students, although this was challenged in an open letter by the OfS

- **Oxford admissions.** Oxford University reported that there had been a significant increase in the number of state school and BAME students offered an undergraduate place this year with much of this following recent reforms to its application system and the implementation of targeted programmes
- **Tackling racist language.** The BBC reported that Sheffield University was preparing to hire some of its own students to oversee, and where necessary report on, incidences of racist language on site
- **KEF Mark 1.** Research England published the first iteration of its Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) incorporating seven perspectives including skills and enterprise and local growth along with potential metrics, and where submissions are due in May this year
- **Civic Universities.** The Universities Minister confirmed the support of key individuals and the sum of £50,000 to the UPP Foundation to help it set up the Civic University Network following last year's report on developing the Civic model
- **Brady MBA.** Karren Brady announced that along with Arden University, she was launching a new online MBA course from this September, aimed at supporting female entrepreneurs and helping combat boardroom gender imbalance

## FE/Skills

- **GCSE English and maths resits.** Awarding Organisations published results for the November GCSE resits in English and maths showing a mixed picture for those seeking the all-important grade 4s
- **Digi skills.** The government and Ofqual published an update on Digital qualifications where a new entitlement of support and qualifications for adults with low digital skills will be available from August 2020 and new Digital Functional Skills will be available the year after
- **Local Skill issues.** The Local Government Association published a new report undertaken for them by the Learning and Work Institute highlighting a potential significant local skills mismatch by 2030 with in particular an oversupply of low-skilled people and undersupply of high-skilled workers
- **Apprenticeship Pay Survey.** The government published its 2018/19 monitoring report on apprenticeship pay, pointing to a slight increase in the percentage of L2 and 3 apprentices being paid below the minimum level but with signs of improvement for new starters and those on higher levels
- **Growing apprenticeships.** White Hat, the organization co-founded by Euan Blair that helps match high-powered school leavers with apprenticeship roles, reported a significant growth in registrations, outreach and partnership work as it reflected on its work over the last year
- **Going West.** South West business and education leaders including the local LEP launched a new Local Growth prospectus aimed at bringing in 190,000 new jobs and £45bn of economic benefit and positioning the region over the next 15 years alongside the Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine
- **Bring back a Skills Minister.** Paul Eeles, Chair of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, called on the Prime Minister to reinstate the position of FE and Skills Minister when the next government reshuffle takes place



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## Schools

- **Test maladministration.** The Standards and Testing Agency reported that there'd been an increase in the number of investigations into maladministration in the 2018 Key Stage 1 and 2 tests, up from 599 cases to 793 with allegations of 'over-aiding' pupils being the main concern
- **Deep dives.** Ofsted outlined its latest research activity around schools which will include continuing work on stuck schools and on behavior, as well as schools' approaches to financial decision making and bringing back subject reviews with the first two set to cover maths and languages
- **Pay and rations.** The Education Policy Institute reported on recent teacher numbers, salaries and long-term trends, pointing to a drop in average salaries between 2010 and 2017 against a rise in pupil numbers and overall spending, suggesting that the government's manifesto promise to raise teacher starting salaries would add further pressure on the system
- **Early years' workforce.** The Education Policy Institute also reported on the workforce for early years and the value or otherwise of recent policy interventions noting that not all had worked and calling on the government to develop a more effective long-term strategy
- **School places.** The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) reported on what it claimed was 'a haphazard' approach to school admissions with parents not always able to exercise genuine choice, as the deadline day for primary places loomed in the middle of the week
- **Do something special.** The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme published a list of 25 'character building' experiences, based on a poll of young people and including 'carrying out a random act of kindness' and 'trying veganism' which it hopes the DfE can build into its character building programmes

## Tweets(s) of the week.

- "Nobody ever obtained a job or won a university place because they have taken a virtuous curriculum. They do it because of qualifications passed" say Sir Dan Moynihan and Martin Oliver" -@AnnMroz
- "As a pupil and teacher, story time has always been the best part of my day" -@DunhusrtODW
- "In the wildest fantasies of 20% of ideal teachers' lessons, students don't follow their instructions first time" -@TeacherTapp
- "All day breakfasts, jelly and ice cream, chocolate cake and crisps: cash-strapped schools offering infants a gastronomic extravaganza tomorrow in a bid to secure extra DfE funding" - @wstewarttes
- "One of the Love Island twins is a UCL student" -@jim\_dickinson

## Other stories of the week

- **Building resilience.** Jane Lunnon, head teacher at Wimbledon High School, published an interesting blog at the start of the new term which has attracted quite a bit of media attention. The blog was aimed at parents and offered them '10 guiding principles' on stepping back occasionally and letting children sort things out themselves first. It includes this for instance: "Think twice, or rather thrice before diving in. 'Three before me' is a helpful mantra. What three things has your child tried to resolve the issue before bringing it to you?" The theme is about building resilience. A link to the blog can be found [here](#)



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## Quote(s) of the week

- “Slowbalisation” – PwC offers its verdict on the global economy in 2020
- “These people have the patience of angels” – Lib-Dem Education spokesperson Layla Moran MP praises teachers in the education debate on the Queen’s Speech
- “Can I encourage you to appoint a dedicated minister with a laser like brief, who is ruthlessly focussed on improving productivity, apprenticeships, skills and FE?” – the Federation of Awarding Bodies calls on the PM to re-appoint an FE/Skills Minister
- “Above all , stay off the parents’ WhatsApp chat group” – Jane Lunnon, headteacher of Wimbledon High School, offers parents some advice on how to manage their children’s school days

## Number(s) of the week

- 0.1%. How much UK GDP grew in the quarter to November 2019, lower than hoped for, according to the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- £10.1bn. How much global investment UK tech companies secured in 2019, up £3bn on the year before according to the latest figures from Tech Nation
- 69%. The number of offers made by Oxford University to British state school students for an undergrad place this year, a record increase according to the University
- £100. How much the University of Sussex is offering students for ‘stress and inconvenience’ experienced during last autumn’s strikes
- 48%. The number of working parents surveyed who reckon that being able to work from home has probably increased the hours they work, according to a new report on Modern Families
- £400. How much the government has spent on teacher recruitment ads per new recruit over the last couple of years, according to a report by Schools Week
- 6%. How much teacher salaries fell in secondary schools between 2010 and 2017 (7% in primary schools,) according to research from the Education Policy Institute
- 20%. The number of young people surveyed who’d never been for a walk or a hike in the countryside, according to a survey of young people’s experiences by the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
- 47.2. The age at which most people hit peak middle-aged grumpiness according to a report from the National Bureau of Economic Research

## What to look out for next week

- Education Questions for MPs (Monday)
- Launch of latest Ofsted Annual Report (Tuesday)
- Davos World Economic Forum (Tuesday - Friday)
- BETT Conference (Wednesday – Saturday)