



Pearson

Policy Watch

Your guide to what's happening in the world of education



The week in a nutshell

As with the wider news cycle this week, **COVID-19 testing** has generated much comment in the schools' context, including during the Secretary of State's appearance before the **Education Select Committee**. Robert Halfon, the Committee chair, opened on the question of the availability of testing for schools, with Gavin Williamson replying that he continued to emphasise the importance of schools to those responsible. The Prime Minister faced similar questions from the **Liaison Committee**. **The NAO** reported on the financial sustainability of FE colleges, describing the situation as "fragile" and calling for a clear vision, role, and funding for the sector. As with the recent report by Dame Mary Ney on college finances, this is another significant contribution in the run up to the publication of the much-anticipated FE White Paper. **The AoC** said the FEWP had to be a "turning point" for the sector. Another eagerly awaited policy piece is the government's response to the Augar review of HE funding and this week the **IFS** published findings into the wage returns on postgraduate study. If ministers choose to go down the route of "picking winners" in terms of funding, reports like this could play an important role in influencing thinking.

Top stories

Gavin Williamson provided evidence to the **Education Select Committee** and the **Prime Minister** to the **Liaison Committee** this week.

- The Secretary of State was quizzed on the return of schools & COVID-19 testing, the summer exam results, the performance of Ofqual, 2021 exams & supporting students in preparation, lost learning & catch up, and the SEND review.
- **Boris Johnson** was asked about prioritising testing for schools and learning catch up,

The NAO has published a **report** examining the financial sustainability of colleges in England.

- The financial health of the college sector has fluctuated since 2013, but showed improvement in 2018-19. Overall, the financial health of the college sector remains fragile.
- Government funding per learner aged 16 to 19 fell by 7 per cent in real terms since 2013-14. Total funding for adult education and support services (excl. apprenticeships) fell by 35 per cent.
- Colleges have narrowed their provision and reduced broader support for students due to financial constraints.
- Despite financial pressures more than four in five colleges as "good" or "outstanding" by Ofsted.
- Recommendations include: need for a clear vision for the role, structure and funding of colleges; reduction in the complexity and uncertainty of the college funding, and evaluate & improve intervention regimes.
- *Stakeholder response:* **AOC**; **ASCL**; **UCU**

Research by the IFS shows a large variation in earnings returns among postgraduate degrees.

- Masters and PhD graduates earn more on average than undergraduates, with PGCE grads earning less.
- Earnings inequality varies widely across qualification groups, with very few PGCE graduates experiencing very high earnings, but also many fewer experiencing low earnings compared with undergraduates.
- The earnings gap between undergraduate and masters is around 2% for women and -2% for men. PhD the gap is 8% (women) and -9% (men). PGCEs are a relatively 'safe' choice reducing the chances of not being in employment but decreasing the probability of earning more than £40k.

Ofsted has published a new report seeking to make oversight of subcontractors in the FE and skills (FES) sectors more transparent and comprehensive.

- Proposals by Ofsted include, working with ESFA to improve access to accurate data and scope of the arrangements between directly funded and subcontracted providers and changing the way evidence is recorded to systematically include information about all visited subcontractors.

Government responds to Petitions Committee report on the impact of COVID-19 on university students.

- The Committee launched an inquiry after more than 350,000 people signed a petition calling for the Government to reimburse all student fees this year (due to lost teaching time).
- Chair of the Petitions Committee, Catherine McKinnell stated that "*we do acknowledge some of the positive steps the Government is taking*". However, she remains sceptical whether universities will be able to "weather the financial storm" and if students will be able to secure refunds where they are entitled to them.

Pearson news

Pearson Teaching Awards 2020 The 76 silver awards winners for this year's Pearson Teaching Awards have been announced. The Awards honour exceptional teaching, across 14 categories, and culminate in a glittering awards ceremony televised by the BBC. [Click here](#)

Pearson tweet of the week



Other news

Parliamentary

- [Gavin Williamson gives evidence to Education Select Committee – Accountability hearing \(video\)](#)
- [Boris Johnson gives evidence to the Liaison Committee, including on schools reopening & COVID testing: video & transcript](#)
- [Lord Storey leads Lords debate on A level & GCSE examinations \(summer 2021\)](#)
- [House of Commons, second reading debate: Unpaid Work Experience \(Prohibition\) \(No. 2\) Bill](#)

COVID-19

- [DfE: Package of support for students who have to defer their studies, including healthcare support; paid tutoring roles; the Civil Service Fast Stream and Early Talent; and Higher Education support.](#)

Schools

- [EEF: Improving literacy at Key Stage 1](#)
- [Mayor of London support package for disadvantaged children returning to school](#)
- [National Literacy Trust launch virtual school library with Duchess of Cornwall](#)
- [NAHT: Behaviour hubs update](#)
- [Joint union statement on government pay proposals \(ASCL, NAHT, NEU and Voice\)](#)
- [Tailored review of the Teaching Regulation Agency](#)

Further Education

- [Ofsted: Subcontracting in further education and skills](#)
- [NAO report: Financial sustainability of further education](#)

Higher Education

- [IFS study: The earnings returns to postgraduate degrees in the UK](#)
- [IFS background note: Family background and access to postgraduate degrees](#)
- [Science Minister, Amanda Solloway, speech on research at Vitae Connections Week 2020](#)

Scotland

- [Scottish Government: £1.5m package to strengthening support for school staff](#)

Wales

- [Carers Trust Wales help young carers catch up after COVID-19 by launching new resources for schools](#)

Northern Ireland

- CCEA: Wellbeing Hub for Primary, SEN and Post Primary Learning launched

Research and analysis

- EDSK: Further consideration – creating a new role, purpose and direction for the FE sector
- Open University: Business Barometer 2020
- Early Intervention Foundation: Five reasons why social and emotional learning is critical to our recovery from Covid-19

Consultation watch

New consultations

- DCMS: UK National Data Strategy (NDS) consultation. Closes 2nd December

Closing consultations

- IFATE: The future of Funding for apprenticeships. [Closes 6th October](#)

What's happening in Parliament next week

House of Commons:

- **Wednesday 23 Sept:** Secondary school provision in Lyde Green - Chris Skidmore MP
- **Friday 25 Sept:** Internet Access (Children Eligible for Free School Meals) Bill: Second Reading - Siobhain McDonagh MP

House of Lords:

- **Wednesday 23 Sept:** External expert advice prior to the use of the algorithm to determine A-level results - Baroness Garden of Frognal