



Pearson

Policy Watch

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



The week in a nutshell

The reopening of schools has once again dominated the news. **Labour** began the week asking an Urgent Question on the government's plans. Wednesday saw the **Prime Minister's** statement which provided some detail, including the hope that schools in England could begin reopening from 8 March. Schools will be given two weeks' notice before opening. Welsh First Minister, **Mark Drakeford**, later announced some students in **Wales** could become the first in the UK to return to the classroom. If rates continue to fall some primary school children could begin a phased return from 22 February. A **report from Ofsted** found that **pupils' engagement and motivation** remain a significant challenge for schools providing remote learning. FE finances were once again under the spotlight as **the Public Accounts Committee** reported on the sustainability of the sector. The chair, Meg Hillier, called on ministers to take a hold of the situation – something which will be needed if deliver on levelling up and building the skills of the nation. In support of that agenda, **Gillian Keegan** announced that employers can now apply for a £1000 cash boost to assist them to take on new trainees.

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Top stories

In a statement to the House of Commons, the Prime Minister outlined the Government's ambitions for the reopening of schools and other educational settings.

- Johnson stated that it would not be possible to reopen schools immediately after the February half-term. He added that he hoped it would be safe to **begin the reopening of schools from 8 March 2021**.
- He also announced that **£300m of new money would be provided to schools under the catch-up programme**, and a long-term plan would be developed to ensure that pupils could make up their learning through the course of Parliament.

Earlier in the week, the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Kate Green asked an urgent question on the Government's strategy for the full reopening of educational settings.

- Schools Minister Nick Gibb said that it was the Government's "strong desire" to reopen all schools, colleges and universities as soon as possible" and continued to note that throughout the pandemic, education has been a "national priority." Two weeks' notice will be given before opening.

The Public Accounts Committee has published a report 'Managing Colleges' Financial Sustainability'

- It found it found that in 2018/19, one in three colleges reported an operating deficit. Although the report recognises that the financial health of the college network is a problem that long preceded the coronavirus pandemic, it notes that the pandemic will put further strain on the sector.
- The committee argues that it is "clearly iniquitous that sixth form colleges have to pay VAT while post-16 academies and schools with sixth forms do not". It continues to argue that this has resulted in the fact that in February 2020, the State was intervening in nearly half of colleges for financial health reasons.

- Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, **Meg Hillier** **noted** that “this is a chance for DfE finally to take a hold and develop the proper, integrated vision for the college sector that it has lacked for so long.”

A new **report** from Ofsted found that pupils’ engagement and motivation remains a significant challenge for schools providing remote learning during the coronavirus related school closures.

- Nearly half of parents who responded to Ofsted’s survey said that keeping their child focused on studying was a top concern, along with motivation and having enough contact with teachers. This was echoed by schoolteachers and leaders.

The Higher Education Statistic Agency has released student **data** for last academic year which shows an increase in overall student numbers with most growth due to non-UK domiciled entrants.

- The total number of HE students stood at 2,532,385 in 2019/20, an increase of 3% from 2018/19.
- The number of first year students from EU countries fell by 2% while the number from non-EU countries rose by 23%.
- A total of 800,335 HE qualifications were awarded in 2019/20, of which 53% were first degrees.
- 35% of classified first degrees were awarded first class honours compared to 28% in 2018/19.

Pearson news

BTEC Awards 2021 The BTEC Awards is an annual competition where the outstanding achievements of BTEC learners, tutors, teachers, schools and colleges around the world are recognised and celebrated. Nominate your BTEC star today. Deadline for submissions is Friday 2 April 2021 [Click here](#)

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Pearson tweet of the week



Other news

COVID-19

- Prime Minister announces education attendance restrictions to remain in place
- Department for Education - Attendance in education and early years settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak
- Children's Commissioner - joint letter with Solace urging the PM to set-out a roadmap to reopen schools
- Children's Commissioner - Damage to children's mental health caused by Covid crisis could last for years without a large-scale increase for children's mental health services
- NAHT - response to the government's plans for the 'full re-opening' of schools
- Sutton Trust - Pandemic pressures on the early years sector

Parliamentary

- House of Commons Statement - Covid-19 Update
- House of Lords Statement - Skills for Jobs White Paper
- House of Lords Statement - Educational Settings: Reopening
- Urgent Question - Educational Settings: Reopening
- House of Commons Library - Higher education funding in England
- House of Commons Library - Youth unemployment statistics
- House of Commons Library - Coronavirus: Student accommodation issues
- House of Commons Library - FE white paper: Skills for Jobs for Lifelong Learning for Opportunity & Growth
- Public Accounts Committee - Government must get a grip on further education sector, with nearly half of colleges in financial measures
- Public Accounts Committee - Thirty-Eighth Report - Managing colleges' financial sustainability
- Education Committee - Left behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (26 January 2021)
- Education Committee - Professor Chris Whitty's response to the NEU regarding evidence given by Jenny Harries to the Committee on Tuesday 19 January, Tuesday 26 January 2021
- Education Committee - Letter to the Chair and Professor Chris Whitty regarding evidence that Dr Jenny Harries gave to the Committee on Tuesday 19th January, 22 January 2021
- Scottish Affairs Committee - Scottish Universities Minister Lochhead to be questioned on Scottish Universities' future

Regulators & inspectorates

- Ofsted - research on pupil motivation around remote education

Schools

- Department for Education - Education Secretary speech to Education Policy Institute on remote learning

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FE & skills

- HM Treasury - Plan for Jobs: skills, employment and support programmes for jobseekers
- Department for Education - Apprenticeships and traineeships: January 2021 (Latest statistics)
- Department for Education - £1000 of Traineeship funding available for employers
- Student Loans Company - Student Loans Company responds to Skills for Jobs white paper
- Learning & Work Institute - Here are 4 things the FE White Paper missed out
- AELP - Outcome focused approach in FE white paper welcomed by training providers

Higher Education

- Department for Education - Government Statistics - Higher education student statistics UK: 2019 to 2020
- Science Council - New nationwide tool to support equality in Higher Education
- Office for Students - White students who are left behind: the importance of place

Scotland

- Scottish Government - Erasmus+ exchange programme

Wales

- First Minister sets out back to school plans
- Statement by the Minister for Education: Update on Qualifications for 2021

Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland Executive - Dodds announces cancellation of vocational and Essential Skills exams
- Learning & Work Institute - Higher skills ambition needed for Northern Ireland

Blogs and reports

- EDSK - Re-Assessing the Future (Part 1): How to move beyond GCSEs

Consultation watch

Closing consultations

DfE - Review of Post-16 Qualifications at level 3: Second stage – closes 31 January

What's happening in Parliament next week

House of Lords

- Tuesday 2 February: Assessing online learning for school pupils - Lord Storey
- Tuesday 2 February: Impact of COVID-19 on youth unemployment - Lord Rose of Monewden

Recess dates announced – Both the Commons and Lords will rise on Thursday 11 February and return on Monday 22 February

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