



Pearson

Policy Watch

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



The week in a nutshell

As the Government announced an end to “Plan B” and mandatory mask wearing, Secretary of State, **Nadhim Zahawi**, has been accused of micromanagement by teaching unions for wanting to vet plans to bring back masks in classrooms. Local health leaders must consult him, should they wish to reintroduce masks in their area. Over 100 schools have said that they will continue the need for masks in lessons.

The other big news from Parliament, was the defection of Bury South MP, **Christian Wakeford** from the Conservatives to Labour. Mr Wakeford is (for now at least) a member of the Education Committee, and the chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for T Levels.

The Office for Students has published plans to take action against poor quality courses provided by universities and colleges. This could result in fines and restricted access to Student Loan funding. The OfS has also launched a consultation on a new approach to regulating student outcomes.

Finally, a petition on the UK Government’s petition website calling for the protection of student choice petition and a reversal of the decision to defund many BTEC qualifications has passed 100,000 signatories. This means that it will be considered for debate by Parliament. The petition forms part of the “[Protect Student Choice](#)” campaign, led by the **Sixth Form Colleges Association**.

Top stories

The Office for Students (OfS) set out plans for universities and colleges offer poor quality courses to face tough regulatory action.

- The regulator has published numerical thresholds which will underpin requirements for minimum student outcomes, and providers not meeting these could face investigation – with fines and restrictions on their access to student loan funding available as potential sanctions. The proposals will sit alongside the OfS’s other conditions of registration on quality in higher education.
- The regulator [has also set out plans](#) to incentivise excellent teaching, learning and student outcomes at universities and colleges performing above our minimum requirements. (Closes 17 March)

The Government has published its response to the Environmental Audit Committee’s report on green jobs.

- The committee’s [report](#) found that the Government was not sufficiently grappling the skills gap needed for net zero, resulting in missed opportunities.
- The response outlines the Government’s actions on green jobs and confirms that the new Green Jobs Delivery Group will include ministers from multiple departments alongside an industry co-chair.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) published new research into the impact of recent and anticipated changes in free school meal eligibility on state-funded mainstream schools in England.

- The research demonstrates that the transitional arrangements introduced by the Government to smooth the roll out of Universal Credit are significantly increasing the number of free school meals eligible pupils.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified this trend, with the number of free school meal eligible pupils increasing by almost 300,000 between January 2020 and 2021.
- The pupils who became newly eligible for free school meals during the pandemic were disproportionately drawn from more disadvantaged areas, and from schools which were most disadvantaged before the pandemic.
- The Pupil Premium grant has not been successful at ensuring that funding for disadvantaged pupils is protected over time.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the latest labour market overview, outlining estimates of employment, unemployment, economic inactivity and other employment-related statistics for the UK.

- For **youth unemployment**, the main points are:
 - The employment rate is 53.7%, up 1 percentage point (ppt) on the previous quarter, but down 1.9 ppts since March 2020 (pre-pandemic).
 - The unemployment rate is 11.1%, down 1.1 ppts on the previous quarter, and down by 0.2 ppts on pre-pandemic levels.
 - The economic inactivity rate for young people is 39.7%, down 0.2 ppts on the previous quarter and up 2.4 ppt since the pandemic.
 - Estimates for young people not in employment, full-time education, and training (NEET) stand at 900,000, up 50,000 on the quarter and down 90,000 since March 2020.

The Edge Foundation publishes “Learning from the past” paper on Polytechnics

- This new series called “Learning from the past” revisits historic policy initiatives that have influenced and driven change across the vocational education and training (VET) system.
- The latest paper looks at Polytechnics - which were designed both to increase entry into HE and to meet an ever-increasing need and demand for higher education courses preparing students for careers in industry, business and the professions.

Pearson news



BTEC Awards 2022 Nominations are open for The BTEC Awards 2022. The awards are about recognising and celebrating the hard work and dedication of BTEC learners, educators, schools, and colleges. Submit your nomination today. [Find out more and nominate now](#)

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Pearson tweet of the week



Other news

Parliamentary

- Christian Wakeford (Bury South), Education Committee member, APPG T Level chair defects to Labour
- Oral Statement: Covid-19 Update
- Lords: Covid-19: Vaccinations for School Pupils
- Lords: Education (Careers Guidance in Schools) Bill – first reading

Regulatory and funding bodies

- ESFA Update: 19 January 2022
- ESFA: High needs funding arrangements: 2022 to 2023 (update)
- Office for Students: OfS sets out plans to crack down on poor quality courses
- Ofsted: Care leavers feel they left care too early, Ofsted finds
- Ofqual: Appointments made (update)
- QAA announced funding for 17 collaborative enhancement projects
- QAA: 'Ready to Learn' Upon Entering Higher Education – new student transitions report published
- QAA appoints interim Director of Quality Assessment England
- QAA confirmed advisory group for upcoming Subject Benchmark Statement reviews

Schools

- OHID: National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) data for the 2020 to 2021 academic year by local authority
- NFER: FSM eligibility changes will make tracking progress of disadvantaged pupils 'almost impossible'
- UCL: Government's approach to teaching reading is uninformed and failing children
- NEU: Easing of Covid restrictions in England

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- NAHT comments on easing of Plan B measures for schools
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation: UK Poverty 2022

Further Education & Skills

- Impetus: Lessons from the youth hub library - it's the details that make a difference
- Environmental Audit Committee: Details yet to be fleshed out on green jobs ambitions, Government admits
- FE funding: initial teacher education (ITE) bursaries 2022 to 2023
- New plans to boost veterans' employment launched
- DCMS Sectors Skills Shortages and Skills Gaps: 2019

Higher Education

- DfE: Monthly statistics on initial teacher training (ITT) recruitment (update)
- UCAS: Pandemic inspires 'future nurses' with a welcome increase in schools and college leavers looking to enter the profession
- Universities Minister Michelle Donelan launches campaign to end the use of Non-Disclosure Agreements when handling complaints of sexual misconduct, bullying and harassment in universities

Northern Ireland

- Further Education Sector Activity Bulletin published

Consultation Watch

New consultations

- OfS: A new approach to regulating student outcomes Closes: 17 March 2022
- The Teaching Excellence Framework Closes: 17 March 2022
- Constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation Closes: 17 March 2022
- NI Department of Education: Consultation on Children and Young People's Strategy initial 3-year Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024 Closes: 9 March 2022

Ongoing consultations

- Ofqual: Consultation on designing and developing accessible assessments Closes: 24 January 2022
- Teachers' Pension Scheme: proposed changes to scheme regulations Closes: 24 January 2022
- Education Committee: Education Challenges facing children and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds Closes: 25 January 2022
- Ofsted's role in the Online Education Accreditation Scheme Closes: 26 January 2022
- Technical consultation on regulating Digital Functional Skills qualifications Closes: 27 January 2022
- Public Accounts Committee: Financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England Closes: 14 March 2022

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What's happening in Parliament next week

Monday 24 January

Commons Committees

- Public Accounts Committee: Academies Sector Annual Report and Accounts 2019-20

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

- APPG ON GLOBAL EDUCATION. Tackling the global learning crisis: A pathway to recovery.
- APPG FOR PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION.

Tuesday 25 January

Westminster Hall

- Role of early years educators (Steve Brine, Con, Winchester)

Commons Committees

- Education Committee: The Government's Catch-up programme

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

- APPG FOR CHILDCARE AND EARLY EDUCATION. AGM and Childcare and Early Education Week 2022

Wednesday 26 January

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

- APPG FOR T-LEVELS. Chaired by Christian Wakeford MP, with the Skills Minister and Shadow Skills Minister as speakers
- APPG FOR VISUAL ARTS. Arts education

Thursday 27 January

House of Lords

- Baroness Coussins (Crossbench) to ask Her Majesty's Government what criteria were used to determine the award to Capita of the contract to administer the Turing Scheme after March 2022.

Friday 28 January

House of Commons – Private Members' Bill

- Climate Education Bill - Second Reading (Nadia Whittome, Lab, Nottingham East)

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