



Pearson

Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 9 August 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.

No Policy Eye last week so two weeks' worth of news to catch up on with three themes evident. First, how education looks to be shaping up under the new government, second, the Spending Review rollover and any potential impact for education, and third more pressing for many, the onset of exam results days.

Other education news from over the last ten days or so includes the release of a progress [report](#) from the Labour Party's Lifelong Learning Commission. The report at this stage is concerned more with the identifying issues than solutions but has started to boil these down to some core themes which will be tackled over the next month by four working groups. The aim is to have a final report ready for the Party's Annual Conference next month.

Elsewhere, university admissions continues to bubble around the higher ed sector with UCAS highlighting continuing upward trends in unconditional offers in a [report](#) last week. Elsewhere the Office for Students published a useful [paper](#) on why people choose degree apprenticeships, with the attractions of 'earn while you learn' an obvious factor, the HE Policy Institute [looked](#) again at what Brexit might mean for student demand while a Lords Select Committee [worried about](#) a number of the Augar proposals.

In FE and Skills where devolved adult education budgets became a reality last week for six mayoral combined authorities and Greater London, the issue of skill shortages was highlighted in the Edge Foundation's latest [Bulletin](#) and the importance of attracting talent in a news article by William Hague.

For schools, two reports from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) have caught the eye. First, the EPI's annual [report](#) on the state of education in England which painted a fairly bleak picture about the extent of the disadvantage gap in secondary: 'by the time they leave secondary, disadvantaged pupils are now over 18.1 months behind non-disadvantaged pupils.' And second, the EPI's [assessment](#) of the new PM's claim on levelling up school funding which in their view, could mean disadvantaged schools missing out.

Finally, back to those two leading themes.

First how education looks to be shaping up under a new government where of course there's been no shortage of advice but where one of the main talking points has been just how the skills responsibilities will play out as part of the new Education Secretary's brief; it's fair to say views are mixed. Final advisory posts are just being filled but this autumn's funding manoeuvres remain the big test for the new team.

And second, for those awaiting results next week and the week after, heartfelt best wishes to all.



Pearson

Top headlines this week

- 'European teachers awarded QTS down 35%.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Call for universities to stop lobbying against admissions overhaul.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Forget about parity of esteem, says former DfE adviser.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Government to fast track spending review to deliver PM's pledges.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Apprentice funding shortfall sparks fears over training.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Spending Review](#). The government confirmed that this year's expected full Spending Review will be postponed until next year and that in the meantime, a one-year 'fast track' Settlement will be completed in September allowing for dept funds notably in areas such as the NHS, schools and the police where promises have been made, to be confirmed
- [Visas for scientists](#). The Prime Minister called on government depts to develop a fast track visa route to enable leading scientists to come and work in the UK including potentially removing the cap on Tier 1 visas for the exceptionally talented and other modifications to the visa system
- [Global talent](#). Former Foreign Secretary William Hague argued in a comment piece in The Daily Telegraph that Britain should adopt a more open door policy to encourage skilled workers and talented students to come to this country recommending among other things that student numbers should be taken out of immigration data

And from the previous week

- [Lifelong Learning](#). The Commission set up by the Labour Party to look into lifelong learning published its interim report listing a number of established themes and outlining four working groups to examine issues in more detail and report back in time for the annual Party Conference next month

HE

- [What will Brexit mean for student demand?](#) The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) pointed to conflicting evidence in this latest briefing with economic modelling throwing up both positive and negative scenarios, calling accordingly for government and institutions to work together to help ameliorate problems
- [Why choose degree apprenticeships](#). The Office for Students published commissioned research looking into why people choose to take degree apprenticeships noting that cost, specific skills training and career progression were all significant factors
- [Student Loans](#). The government confirmed the annual updates to interest rates and thresholds for student loans for 2019/2020
- [Research funding](#). The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee issued its report into science research funding in universities, raising concerns about many of the Augar proposals particularly the cut in tuition fees which could see R/D funding raided to subsidise other activity



Pearson

- [Time for PQA?](#) The Guardian delved further into the debate about university admissions looking in particular at the system of post-qualification admissions (PQA) finding opinions both for and against
- [More on contextual admissions.](#) The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) followed up its recent report on what students think about contextual admissions with a blog suggesting various approaches that institutions could use to help keep students informed such as raising more widely awareness of educational disadvantage
- [Non-prescribed qualifications.](#) Dave Phoenix, V.C. at London South Bank provided a useful primer on the HEPI website on so-called non-prescribed qualifications, typically higher level skills courses leading to a range of specific certificates and diplomas and due to be reworked under the Augar proposals as funded kite-marked provision

And from the previous week

- [Power on.](#) The government outlined the full regulatory powers now statutorily available to the Office for Students and intended to ensure that universities act in the best interests of students in areas like recruitment, standards and access
- [Take 5.](#) The Times Higher reflected on five big priorities (Augar, Brexit, visas, TEF, new providers) facing Jo Johnson as he returned to his post as Universities Minister
- [Unconditional offers.](#) UCAS reported on the use of unconditional offers as part of this year's admissions cycle noting that this had continued to increase with nearly two in five applicants receiving at least one offer with an unconditional component in it this year
- [Characteristics Statement.](#) The QAA published new guidance setting out the characteristics of higher education delivered through apprenticeships
- [Brexit from abroad.](#) Two visiting academics from the EU offered their thoughts on Brexit and what it might mean for academia stressing the importance of continuing partnerships and mobility in a blog for the University of Bath's Institute for Policy Research

FE/Skills

- [Skills Shortages.](#) The Edge Foundation published its latest Skills Shortages Bulletin, the fifth in its series analyzing skills shortages highlighting evidence from the OU, LinkedIn and the ONS and focusing in particular on shortages in health and social care
- [End Point assessments.](#) Ofqual reported on its work over the last year in assuring apprenticeship standards and end point assessment arrangements, highlighting its work in dealing with non-compliance and other regulatory requirements and pointing to continuing lessons learned
- [Levy shortages.](#) The Association of Employment and Learning providers (AELP) raised concerns in a new paper about apprenticeship levy funds drying up pointing to the fact that many training providers were no longer able to meet the demands from SME employers to train new apprentices
- [Pathways into Construction.](#) The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) announced a new £10m project to try and attract more people from under-represented groups into the industry over the next three years as forecasts suggest 168,500 jobs will need to be filled in the sector by 2023



Pearson

And from the previous week

- **Devolved budgets.** The six mayoral combined authorities plus the GLA assumed responsibility for adult education budgets from the start of the month
- **Further perceptions of voc and tech qualifications.** Ofqual published its second annual survey of employers', learners' and training providers' views on functional skills and end point assessments reporting some consolidation on the previous year but also some gaps as well

Schools

- **School exclusions.** The RSA reflected on the latest data on school exclusions suggesting that as the upward trend continues, the issue is as much about social justice as anything else with for example a correlation between pupil disadvantage and chances of exclusion

And from the previous week

- **End of term report.** The Education Policy Institute with the Fair Education Alliance published their latest 'state of education in England' report suggesting no decline in standards but a worrying increase in the disadvantage gap in secondary years particularly among some groups and regions
- **Levelling up.** The Education Policy Institute looked into Boris Johnson's pledge to level up funding in English schools concluding that raising the level on notional data would cost more than was being proposed and equally could mean that schools in more challenging areas would attract less funding
- **Ofsted blog.** Sean Harford, Ofsted National Director, outlined in a new blog aimed at parents, how the new inspection framework due to commence this September will operate
- **Changes to Conditions of Recognition.** UK qualification regulators issued consultation on some changes to 'exam board' conditions of recognition aimed at improving and clarifying some of the wording around fees, use of independent reviewers, and special consideration among other things

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "Nearly time for my annual celebration of people completing vocational quals. Next Wed 14th Aug people who've done BTECs, City&Guilds, NVQs, Cambridge Technicals etc will be on BBC News (like A-Level results day) - [@stephbreakfast](#)
- "As always today brings mixed emotions. Some pupils delighted, some upset. I wish them all the knowledge that grades do not define a person" - [@MrReynoldsRSHT](#)
- "The other madness is trying to achieve 'parity of esteem'. Totally pointless and impossible. Lots of countries have great technical education. None of them have parity of esteem. Including Germany"- [@jonpayates](#)
- "Durham student writes dissertation on existence of God in 8 hours and gets a 2:1" - [@jim_dickinson](#)
- "Most people would rather lose their job to a robot than another human" - [@newscientist](#)

Other stories of the week

Policy Eye

Week ending Friday 9 August 2019



Pearson

- Surviving on a student budget. The latest National Student Money Survey updated this week has some fascinating facts and figures about where students source their money (74% maintenance loan, 73% parents, 49% overdraft,) what they spend their money on (£431 a month on rent, £34 a month on takeaways, £17 a month on phones) and how to survive on a student budget (lots of creative ways not all suitable for coverage here!) A link to the full survey can be found [here](#)
- The changing nature of families and households. A new report out from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) offers an interesting glimpse into household and family life. The report is based on 2018 data. It shows that married and civil partner couple families were the most common family type in the UK last year representing two-thirds of families but the numbers of same-sex couple families has increased considerably, young adults are tending to stay at home longer and more than 8m people live alone. The full report can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- “If the pass rate only went up people would rightly question the robustness of our assessment system” – the Scottish Education Secretary reflects on his country’s latest exam results
- “We are concerned that it will be fraught with difficulties and that it will remove autonomy from universities” – the Lords Science and Technology Committee raises concerns about a body such as the OfS determining the economic and social value of courses
- “The department is still considering the feasibility and practicality of a centralised portal for further education and will make final decisions on this in the context of wider reforms to technical qualifications” – the government responds to a written question in Parliament about the case for a UCAS style portal for technical education
- “Someone has a much higher chance of being in the top 1% of income-earners at some point in their lives than they do in any given year” – the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) offers some consolation in its analysis of the top 1% of high earners
- “This is a different kind of hard work” – one of the secret entrepreneurs who went back into school to help out as part of Channel 4’s latest TV edu-documentary series which aired for the first time last night

Number(s) of the week

- £807. The average monthly living costs for university students in the UK with most of it going on accommodation costs according to the National Student Money Survey
- 66%. How many people in a survey believed that more people going to university and fewer gaining technical qualifications had been bad for the country, according to a voter survey by the Onward think-tank
- 12%. The drop in the number of European teachers awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in 2018/19, according to a report in the TES
- 2,168. The word count for this year’s KS2 reading tests, up 45%, according to media reports
- 3.4m. The number of 20-34 year olds in the UK living with their parents last year, according to latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS)



Pearson

What to look out for next week

- Voc quals celebration day (Wednesday)
- A' level results day (Thursday)
- Deadline for submission of evidence on adult skills and lifelong learning to the Education Committee Inquiry (Thursday)