# Policy Eye

## Highlights of week ending Friday 8 November 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.

Two top stories this week: the rush, largely by the DfE, to get stuff out before Parliament was dissolved and purdah took over and second, how things are shaping up as the election campaign gets under way.

Let's start with the burst of papers, reports and guidance documents released by the DfE and others ahead of the dissolution of Parliament on Wednesday.

Top of the bill for many was the announcement from the DfE on 16-19 funding where the Education Secretary added further detail to the £400m cash boost announced by the Chancellor for this area at the end of the summer. A large chunk of this will go on high cost courses such as engineering and science, some will go on GCSE English and maths resits but also some on so-called 'high value' courses, largely STEM and some T levels through a new high-value course premium. Exact amounts won't be clear until the end of the year but it's an interesting move in funding direction and raises some questions about the positioning of other subjects.

Two other areas of note from the DfE papers concern the curriculum. First, the government is launching a review of GCSE modern foreign languages, this coming by the way at the same time as Ofqual announced changes to grading standards in French and German GCSE for the 2020 exam series. And second, iGCSEs, a topic that's been of interest to the Education Committee where the government published the results of its recent comparability study on performance against mainstream GCSEs recognizing the importance of future alignment of standards.

Not all important reports have come from the DfE this week. The reports from JISC on the digital experience of teaching staff in UK FE and HE, from UCAS on early stage 2020 applications, and from the Educational Policy Institute on life outcomes for those taking vocational qualifications also stand out.

And so to the second big story of the week, the buildup of activity around the general election.

All the major Parties have now kicked off their campaigns sticking largely to familiar lines when it comes to education, so levelling up school funding for the Conservatives, scrapping tuition fees for Labour, although respective Chancellors appear to have entered a spending war. More specific policies will follow in what are promised to be, shorter manifestos. For the moment, most of the education policy suggestions have been coming in from other education players with manifestos published this week and listed below from the Association of Colleges (AoC,) Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the Sutton Trust. There's some interesting propositions in among the detail of these.

## Top headlines this week

- 'Protect BTECs and boost sixth-form cash, say colleges.' (Monday)
- 'Universities undermined by overseas autocracies.' (Tuesday)
- 'Future of Ofsted moves centre stage in election battle.' (Wednesday)
- 'Repeated GCSE resits could harm student health.' (Thursday)
- 'Record numbers signing up to study medicine at university.' (Friday)

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- Social Mobility Manifesto. The Sutton Trust published a social mobility manifesto for the general election with proposals that included opening up independent schools, implementing a post-qualification application system for higher ed and banning unpaid internships
- A Manifesto for the North. The North of England published a unique manifesto for its region, based on ideas generated at the recent Convention of the North, and calling for rebalanced investment, a green economy, a dedicated transport budget and local management of education and skills provision
- Staying secure. The government issued a range of guidance to schools and colleges on how to manage and respond to security related incidents, following earlier consultation, pointing to the need for risk assessment, preventative measures and business continuity processes as part of overall security planning
- Digital experience survey. JISC published its latest survey on the digital experience of teaching staff in universities and colleges finding access to services improving but staff unhappy about limited training opportunities, a lack of clarity on digital requirements and a failure to recognize innovative practices
- Climate change. A group of college and university leaders announced the launch next week of a new Climate Commission which, over the next year, will work with education leaders and institutions to develop a coherent strategy on tackling climate issues
- Artificial Intelligence in the public sector. Zurich Municipal outlined some of the risks and challenges for organisations taking on AI

### HE

- Early cycle UCAS applications. UCAS reported on the first phase of 2020 undergraduate applications, those for medical, vet and dentistry courses, showing a further rise in applications notably from 18 year olds as well as from those outside the EU
- The student vote. The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) published further survey evidence from YouthSight on how students might vote with Brexit emerging as a defining issue and many (53%) prepared to vote tactically over Brexit
- Threats to academic freedom. The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee highlighted concerns about threats to academic from autocratic states attempting to infiltrate and influence campuses, calling for government to appoint a lead figure responsible for coordinating responses and to come back by Autumn 2020 with a detailed strategy for this area

- Mental health concerns. The Office for Students (OfS) reported on some of the issues faced by students with declared mental health conditions, particularly those from different ethnic groups and poorer backgrounds who often struggle to finish their courses and/or secure skilled employment

- Security sensitive research material. Universities UK updated its guidance about the storage and circulation of security-sensitive research material highlighting the need for such material to be kept off personal computers and for clear institutional procedures to be in place

- UKHE TNE. Universities UK published its report into the scale of UKHE transnational education for 2017/18, pointing to an increase in the number of providers but a drop in the number of students in three of the five types of provision

- Employing international students. Universities UK and Fragomen LLP published guidance on such matters as Tier 2 visas, sponsorship and right to work checks, for employers looking to hire international graduates

- There's an app for that. Mary Curnock Cook reported on an app, developed by The Student Room and three universities as a way of providing regular support and contact with students, and currently being road tested ahead of possible roll-out

- A Wonkhe manifesto. Participants at this week's Wonkfest drafted their own manifesto for the forthcoming general election listing six top priorities including removing the fee debt for certain public sector workers after 3 years in post and creating a national access fund

- Strike action. The University and College Union (UCU) announced eight days of strike action over changes to pensions as well as a lack of progress on pay and working conditions with the action due to start on Monday November 25

## FE/Skills

- 16-19 funding. The government set out how a large chunk of the recently announced extra £400m for 16 -19 year olds in 2020/21 should be spent, with some going on high cost courses, some on high value courses and some on English and maths resits

- Subcontracting. Ofsted announced it intended to conduct further research in the coming months on subcontracting, looking in particular at the relationship between the main provider and the contractor and at the quality of provision that follows

- A manifesto for FE. The Association of Colleges (AoC) published its manifesto proposals for the upcoming general election listing five proposals including: being at the heart of a new regulatory regime with increased investment for staff, students and college estates, and reinvigorated lifelong learning

- A manifesto for sixth form education. The Sixth Form Colleges Association published its manifesto for the general election listing four proposals: raising the per student funding rate: creating a dedicated capital fund; establishing a more coherent process for new sixth form provision; and protecting applied qualifications like BTECs

- Health notice. The Education Policy Institute reported on the life outcomes of those studying vocational courses in a report commissioned by the Health Foundation, pointing to such learners often facing poorer employment and lifestyle opportunities and calling for better investment and support accordingly

**Schools**

- iGCSEs and GCSEs. The DfE published the results of its analysis comparing performance by pupils taking iGCSEs and those taking GCSEs showing a slight drop in average performance by iGCSE students at Key Stage 5 and a mixed picture, varying by subject and exam board, at Key Stage 4

- Government response on iGCSE/GCSE comparability survey. Nick Gibb outlined the government's response to its comparability study on performance between iGCSE and GCSE students confirming that steps were being taken to align standards in the future

- Languages review. The DfE announced a review into the subject content of GCSE modern foreign languages as Ofqual confirmed it would align grading in French and German with that of Spanish for the 2020 series to ensure greater comparability of grading standards

- Extending Opportunity. The government announced that it was extending the Opportunity Area programme intended to boost attainment in more disadvantaged parts of the country, for at least a further year with some additional money thrown in

- SEND Trial. The DfE announced that its work on extending the appeals system around Education, Health and Care assessments for special needs would now run until the end of August 2020 to allow for evaluation to complete

- Character education. The DfE set out its non-statutory guidance for schools for the provision of character education listing six benchmarks that can be used to help determine quality provision

- ASCL manifesto. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) published its manifesto for the general election listing 10 priorities including making the curriculum fit for the 21$^{st}$c and making GCSEs less punishing but also for an end to talking education down

- School governors manifesto. The National Governance Association (NGA) issued its list of priorities for the forthcoming general election listing 12 items including better recognition of governance, paid clerking, increased school funding and support for special needs

- PISA 2018. Professor John Jerrim continued the build-up to the 2018 test results, due out in three weeks' time, by offering some thoughts on the PISA methodology, arguing that while not perfect, criticisms of it have been overblown

- Violence Reduction. Sadiq Khan, London Mayor, announced funding from London's specialist Violence Reduction Unit to help with tackling school exclusions, supporting the transition to secondary school and confronting the often difficult block of time just after school has ended for the day

## Tweets(s) of the week.

- "The show must go on! @GavinWilliamson steps in to ensure school nativities aren't cancelled because of the December election" - @SchoolsWeek

- "Italy is to become the first country in the world to make classes on climate change compulsory in schools. From September, schools will dedicate an hour a week to learning about global warning and sustainable development" - @EMCUK

- "'The job of a university is to turn out intelligent citizens' Julie Lydon VC Uni of South Wales at #Wonkfest. Hear, Hear! It's not just about graduate salaries" - @JulieWalking1

- "Opportunity areas getting an £18m extension for another year. Trying to find a joined-up approach to entrenched difficulties is a problem that isn't going away" - @seanjcoughlan

- "If I have to be subjected to any more PD, classes, or lectures on "what a microagression is" I'm going to scream" - @MsJasmineMN
- "I'm officially too old for this teaching game now! A student called me Grandad yesterday!!@ - @agittner

## Other stories of the week

- Changing the image. For many people, the image of an engineer is of a white bloke wearing a hard hat and probably a high-vis jacket. This is a restrictive image that the Royal Academy of Engineering is out to change. As part of national Engineering Day this week, it teamed up with leading organisations such as the BBC, Facebook and Ocado to help recast the image and encourage more young people from all backgrounds to consider a career in engineering. The project is particularly important given that we could face a shortage of 20,000 graduate engineers over the coming years. A link to the article is here

## Quote(s) of the week

- "My predecessors and I have in the past been obliged to write publicly about the misuse of statistics in both pre-election and pre-referendum periods" – the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority fires a warning shot across the bows of Party leaders as the election gets under way
- "10 years on, those divides have got worse" – David Willetts highlights generational gaps in the second edition of his book 'The Pinch'
- "At the risk of sounding like the Grinch before Christmas, I encourage schools to change Christmas jumper day to something more straightforward, such as Christmas hat day" Labour MP Emma Hardy leads a debate on the last day in Parliament on school uniforms
- "It is for the convenience of timetabling, not the psychology of attention and retention" – education blogger Donald Clark reflects on the merits or otherwise of the 60 minute university lecture model
- "We are satisfied that a sufficiently strong case exists for us to intervene to adjust grading standards in GCSE French and German" – Ofqual announces aligned grading standards for 2020
- "Like any study, it has both strengths and limitations" – Professor John Jerrim reports on the PISA methodology
- "We're moving the launch of our Annual Report to January" – Ofsted confirms it'll wait until after the election (and Christmas) to release its Annual Report

## Number(s) of the week

- 68,680. How many students have applied for 2020 undergraduate courses by the mid October deadline, another high according to latest figures from UCAS
- Over 70%. How many university students think the government has failed to listen to what young people have been saying about Brexit, according to a survey from the HE Policy Institute (HEPI)
- 70%. How many teaching staff in FE had access to reliable wifi compared to 84% of HE teaching staff, according to the latest survey from JISC
- 6. The number of 16-19 'high cost' subject areas that will see their programme cost weightings increase in 2020/21, according to a new announcement on 16 -19 funding by the government

- 311,200. The number of apprenticeship starts (all ages) for the first three quarters of the 2018/19 year, up on the previous year but down on the two years before that, according to an answer in Parliament
- £18m. How much has been promised by the government to extend the Opportunity Area programme for a further year

## What to look out for next week

- 2019 election activity