



**2019 PREDICTIONS:
EDUCATION**

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We began the year with a new education secretary. Hinds' first public outing in his new role came at 2018's Education World Forum. Ministers from across the world heard him set his intentions to reduce workload, and to explore the role that edtech could play in doing so.

Workload, along with edtech, recruitment, retention and wellbeing were then regular themes for the DfE's communications team for the rest of the year. The more reactive communications from the DfE in 2018 - responses to criticism in different areas - can be categorised as firefighting. T levels, funding claims, Ofsted's mooted inspection changes, opportunity areas and teacher pay levels all reared their heads. The department has no doubt been very busy. But what of 2019?

DfE intentions: Following the end of the academic year, the DfE released its two-page list of priorities. It's no surprise that teacher recruitment and retention are a priority. They should be. So too were wellbeing and workload, along with technical and vocational education. It was also no surprise that there was a call for ensuring our academic standards match those of high performing nations, although there is a need for clarity here. By 'high performing nations', was the DfE referring to perennial favourite Singapore (where the majority of students receive private tuition and wellbeing is increasingly an issue), or progressive systems like Finland and the Netherlands? This will no doubt continue to be debated but it does now seem that less attention is paid to looking overseas for inspiration than under previous education secretaries.

Teacher recruitment and retention and workload: While Hinds has spoken repeatedly about his desire to reduce the teacher workload, at a fringe meeting at the 2018 Conservative Party Conference, he was more realistic. "It's one of the frustrating things in my job that I know that workload is the single biggest drag factor in the teaching profession today, and there's not actually, it turns out, quite so much as you might hope that the government you can do about it."

More positivity about education: Tackling workload is just one issue at play when it comes to addressing recruitment and retention issues; the profession as a whole is suffering from bad publicity. With another year of failing to meet recruitment targets, there is a sign that the DfE will attempt to introduce more positivity about the profession. How and when remains unclear.

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Character, resilience and wellbeing: In his keynote speech at 2018's Conservative Party Conference, Hinds called for a doubling down on academic standards and the need to focus on 'rounded individuals'. Although unlikely to be made into policy, they will (and should) be focuses for 2019.

Grammar schools and selective education: In contrast to Justine Greening's antipathy towards Grammar schools, Hinds' was thought to be in favour of Theresa May's policy. However, policy shifted towards expansion of existing grammar schools rather than opening new ones. That said, March 2018's announcement that £50 million would go to creating more grammar school places made it clear that policy makers believe grammar expansion will result in greater choice for parents. Selective education is a divisive issue though, and to avoid further conflict with the sector, subtle rather than overt support for expansion is likely. More attention will be paid to what action grammar schools take to increase the intake of poorer students.

Teacher pay levels: In August 2018, the DfE was heavily criticised for its decision not to fully implement the School Teachers' Review Body's call for all teachers to receive 3.5 per cent pay rise. The DfE recommendations were for those on the upper levels of pay to be awarded a 2 and 1.5 per cent rise. It was [noted](#) that this was the first time, since at least 2008, that the government has failed to fully implement the panel's recommendations on pay awards. The UK's economic health post-Brexit will undoubtedly be a determining factor when it comes to pay levels but it is also likely that the sector will not be sympathetic to difficulties that the DfE may have in securing increases.

Policy on off-rolling: At his first education committee appearance in March 2018, Hinds talked about wanting fewer exclusions. An issue that has grown in prominence through 2018, exclusions and off-rolling are seen as dark arts for some schools and MATs to boost their league table performance. It's highly likely that this issue will come up again in 2019.

Technical and vocational education: T Levels came under criticism in 2018 but this is unlikely to deter from the 2020 implementation target. The challenge for the DfE's flagship technical education reforms came from the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) but was dropped this summer. Autumn then saw Minister Anne Milton renew the DfE's relationship with the FAB, calling for collaboration where possible.

“For T-levels to be a success we need to get to a whole new level of teamwork. We need partnership across the entire system,” she said.

Ofsted inspection changes: The proposed overhaul of school inspections was a hotly debated topic in 2018 and 2019 will be no different. The calls for greater autonomy and for inspections to cover the quality of curricula are somewhat contradictory though, and could spell trouble. The launch of a new inspection framework in September will no doubt mean that these topics are discussed in detail by schools this year.

EdTech: Hinds’ first public outing as education secretary at 2018’s Education World Forum saw him extol the promise of EdTech. August then saw him challenge the EdTech industry to create a step-change in education in key areas, including assessment, delivery of teacher training, supporting inclusion and tackling teacher workload. This year should see the introduction of new methods of evaluating EdTech from UCL’s EDUCATE initiative, along with other players. The EdTech sector could well begin to work more collaboratively with education to ensure product value and suitability.

Mental health, social mobility, apprenticeships, school funding and funding for SEND pupils are also likely to make an appearance this year. It’s probable that the Ofsted inspection changes will dominate, come September. The suggestion that the quality of curricula will be inspected may well prompt further debate on how and what we teach our children. One thing is definitely certain though – we don’t know what post-Brexit Britain will look like, but we do know that our success in future will be determined by the strength and quality of our workforce. We’ll need future generations to innovate and meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. That means, just like health, education is a priority for all of us.