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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 5 August 2016



(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

The economy, education opportunity, the graduate premium and this year's performance measures make up the news this week. Links to most can be found below but a word on each to help set the scene

The economy first where there's been a slew of reports recently including from the Bank of England, CBI, Purchasing Managers and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research all painting a fairly fretful picture. The government's response includes work on a new industrial strategy which with its emphasis on skills and productivity is of obvious interest to the world of education. This week the new PM chaired the first meeting of the strategy group, a former special adviser joined the No 10 team, the regions expressed concerns about regeneration funding and the BEIS Committee announced a new inquiry into the industrial strategy overall. This is a key area of work for the government let alone education

On education opportunity, two developments stand out this week. First, the week saw the replacement of HE maintenance grants by loans amid a further chorus of concerns about the impact on poorer students; the timing was unfortunate with the latest widening participation stats showing a continuing gap between advantaged and disadvantaged HE entrants. And second, the SchoolDash website published an interesting analysis of schools with disadvantaged pupils indicating that some of the leading school types, converter academies, primary free schools, grammar schools and so on, had the fewest number of poorer pupils

The graduate premium, the projected economic returns a degree can bring over a lifetime which in recent times had been estimated at around £400,000 came in for heavy criticism in a new report this week from the Intergenerational Foundation. Intergenerational inequality, or the eating of the lunches of future generations by the baby boomers is fast becoming a big policy issue and the charge here is that students on some courses at least are being enticed into HE on the basis of unproven returns. It's a controversial read

This week also saw the release of the latest guidance on this year's school and college performance table measures. There are particular concerns this year because of the introduction of new headline measures along with the application of floor standard and coasting criteria. A link to the guidance paper is below

And finally for those who may have missed Channel 4's Child Genius programme which has been in the news this week, and not all for the right reasons, here's a sample of a couple of questions that the 10 year old winner faced: 'In the navigational term GPS, what does the letter P stand for? Which British Prime Minister was a neighbour of the (Florence) Nightingale family?' Answers at the bottom of this briefing



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Top headlines this week

- 'New online portal will offer schools free access to thousands of marked exams.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Student debts wipe out most graduate pay premiums – report.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Private schools extend lead in entrants to university.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Number 10 scraps education adviser role.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Minister calls for living wage for apprentices to achieve social justice.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Who's doing what?](#) The BEIS Dept provided its listing of ministerial responsibilities following recent Dept changes, showing science, research and the development of a comprehensive industrial strategy among its key priorities
- [Counting the cost of UK poverty.](#) The Joseph Rowntree Foundation followed up its earlier work on child poverty by examining the cost and impact of poverty across all social groups suggesting a total annual cost to the public purse of some £78bn

HE

- [Premium or not.](#) The Intergenerational Foundation published a sharp report into the reality of the graduate premium arguing that claims about the economic returns on a degree should be treated with some caution particularly in the case of some courses
- [From grants to loans.](#) The removal of maintenance grants in favour of maintenance loans, announced by George Osborne last summer, was officially introduced this week
- [In the hot seat.](#) Sheffield Hallam's V.C. Professor Chris Husbands was announced as the inaugural chair of the Teaching Excellence Framework where he'll help steer the university ratings system for 2017/18 and 2018/19
- [A former Secretary of State speaks.](#) John Denham, Skills Secretary under Gordon Brown, offered further reflections on his recent report into the development of higher-level skills and employer involvement, indicating that part of the problem was that it had become a supply rather than demand side issue
- [Visa easer.](#) The Home Office launched a two-year pilot scheme for those applying for master's courses at four selective universities (Bath, Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial) making it easier for students from these universities to stay on at the end of the course and find a job but at the same time raising concerns about the emergence of a two-tier system
- [Student survey changes.](#) HEFCE announced some changes to its National Student Survey and Unistats data following recent consultation



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FE/Skills

- [And 332 become 322](#). The number of Colleges in England was reduced by ten as the latest wave of post-review mergers in various parts of the country was formally completed
- [Inspection update](#). Ofsted updated its inspection arrangements for use in the FE and skills sector from Sept 2016 to reflect the increasing number of college mergers and partnerships
- [Legacy funding](#). The Skills and Education Funding Agencies confirmed funding arrangements for legacy GCSEs and IGCSEs in English and maths for 2016/17
- [Mr President](#). Ian Ashman, formerly principal at Hackney Community College, set out his initial priorities, as he took up his post as the Association of Colleges' latest President

Schools

- [Latest performance table guidance](#). The DfE issued its guidance for the 2016 school and college performance tables incorporating developments arising out of the new accountability arrangements
- [Paving the way](#). Pearson announced plans for improving transparency in the exam system by making marked GCSE and A' level exam scripts available for free next year following a pilot this year
- [Access and opportunity](#). Data cruncher SchoolDash examined data on school access and opportunity and found many leading school types, including some faith schools, grammar schools and converter academies, with low numbers of disadvantaged pupils, raising questions about admissions policies generally
- [Banking on success](#). UCAS reported on its analysis of predicted and actual A' level grades for 18 yr olds last year noting that over half missed their predicted grades by two or more levels and concluding that GCSE results and the mix of A' level subjects provided the most robust determinants
- [Destination data](#). The DfE published details of how it was using new employment and benefits data to strengthen its destination measures for students completing key stage 5

Tweet(s) of the week

- "TBH, I'm just calling it 'BIS.' Then pausing. Then not caring" – [@xtopercooke](#) (as debate continues about how best to pronounce the new BEIS Dept)
- "People like change. People don't like being changed" – [@jOnhyde](#)
- "There's a university (Idaho) offering course credits for playing Pokemon Go" – [@Independent](#)
- "I'm convinced some children think their teachers are popped into the cupboard and plugged in to charge overnight" – [@tes](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 'Brainwriting. According to US researchers brainstorming as a group creative technique is out and brainwriting, (generating ideas singly using pen and paper and passing them round to generate group buy-in,) is in. The benefit of the latter is that it allows individual creative juices to flow rather than being dominated by group noise, apparently



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Quote(s) of the week

- “There is a lot to do and some big decisions to be taken” – new Education Secretary Justine Greening sizes up the task ahead of her
- “Subject to the passage of the Bill, we intend to consult before summer 2017” – the HE Minister sets out the timescale for proposed changes to Degree Awarding Powers
- “My dream is that if someone says at a dinner that they’re doing an apprenticeship and another person says they’ve been to Oxbridge, that people will be more impressed by the apprentice” – Skills Minister Robert Halfon on a mission for apprenticeships
- “Disgraceful” – the National Union of Students reacts to this week’s introduction of maintenance loans
- “The secret is to make those nerves your ally” – Schools Minister Nick Gibb on the art of public speaking
- “The English Baccalaureate has reinforced a hierarchy of subjects in secondary schools, with English and maths at the top and the arts at the bottom” – leading education commentator John Dunford makes the case for the arts
- “Pupils get that they’re crap with money and they’re wanting to do something about it” – MoneySavingExpert Martin Lewis calls for more financial literacy in schools

Number(s) of the week

- 30. The number of ‘fake’ universities shut down over the past year under the Prospects HE Degree Datacheck project according to the latest report (but with over 200 having been formally identified there’s still a long way to go)
- 2. The number of jobs per jobseeker on average across the UK in June according to the job search engine Adzuna
- £10bn. How much of the annual schools budget is spent on combating the impact of poverty according to a report commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- 30. How many years it could take to even halve the attainment gap between the most and least advantaged schools according to a recent speech by the Social Mobility Commission chairman
- 17%. The gap between Free School Meal and non - Free School Meal students entering HE in 2013/14, according to the latest set of official figures, a gap that has hardly improved over the last five years
- 8hrs,45 mins. How much time the average Brit spends on their various phones, laptops and TVs a day (more than they spend asleep) according to figures from Ofcom
- 13. How many weeks summer holiday Italian school children have, the highest in Europe according to EU figures. (The UK, along with Germany and Denmark on six weeks each have the lowest, to the relief of some parents)

What to look out for next week

- Parliament in recess (until Sept 5)

(Quiz answers: P stands for Positioning and the Prime Minister who was a neighbour of the Nightingales was Lord Palmerston)