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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 10 June 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

It's been a big week for data and statistics and not just because of the exams this week.

The blitz of data released has covered: university admissions profiles, undergraduate student satisfaction levels, teacher training and supply, A' level take-up in different parts of the country and changes in social mobility. According to the old adage; 'if you torture data enough it will ultimately confess.' There's no evidence of thumbscrews here but how far we've learned anything particularly new or dramatic from such 'confessionals' remains to be seen.

Here's a quick summary of some of the key messages.

On the university admissions data which was presented at an institutional level for the first time by UCAS, the headline story that certain core groups, in this case white working-class males and black applicants, are underrepresented particularly at the most prestigious universities, remains. UCAS was keen to stress that too much shouldn't be read into individual institutional profiles and that admissions processes remain "broadly fair" but it's clear as the Sutton Trust reminded us, that access challenges remain.

The annual Student Academic Experience Survey compiled by HEPI and HEA which saw the 2016 results published this week, contained a number of interesting details. The survey included some new data this year including on the time it takes to return marked assignments, students reckon it should be two weeks but this doesn't happen in three-quarters of cases, but the headline message is that while students are happy with their course (85%), they're not about value for money (37%) or further fee increases (86%.)

Teacher training and supply was the subject of two Education Committee witness sessions this week and of a stinging report from the Public Accounts Committee. The latter highlights two specific figures. First that the government spends £700m training new teachers each year with £167m on bursaries but is not clear about how effective such investment is. Second, 18% of teachers for EBacc subjects were non-specialists at the last count in 2014. Things may have improved but an earlier NAO report suggested gaps may remain.

The issue of gaps in regional A' level take-up was raised in some research by the New Schools Network this week. Their conclusion was that in 27 local authorities, less than a quarter of eligible local pupils were being entered and predominantly in disadvantaged areas. They called for more support and access.

And finally, a new report this week from the Social Mobility Commission includes a mass of data on socio-economic disadvantage and how far gaps are closing. To end on a slight up, parents today are spending 40 minutes more per day on activities with their kids although many families are still missing out.

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Top headlines this week

- 'Government proposes new laws to stop illegal schools.' (Monday)
- 'Term time holiday dad to help others.' (Tuesday)
- 'Gaps in A level take-up revealed.' (Wednesday)
- 'Students doubts rise over university value for money.' (Thursday)
- 'Ministers have no plans to address teacher shortages.' (Friday)

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- **On the student journey.** HE Minister Jo Johnson uses his speech to the HE Policy Institute Annual Conference to outline how the government's HE reforms are intended to help provide students with wider opportunities of where and how to study and receive high-quality teaching
- **Missing the target.** The Public Accounts Committee issues a scathing report on the DfE's management of teacher training arguing that training places are below target, that some subjects are being taught by non-specialists, and that the government appears to have no coherent plans to address the problem
- **A force for good or disruption?** Cabinet Office Minister Matthew Hancock MP ponders the question in the annual Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture for the Centre for Policy Studies and argues the former as he highlights ways in which digital advancements can help improve social mobility, jobs and learning
- **Teeing up the Tees.** Lord Heseltine adopts the powerhouse model for Teeside with a call for more apprenticeships, new industries and a new Development Corporation to rejuvenate an area suffering since the closure of the steelworks
- **Unpaid interns.** Conservative peer Lord Holmes (a member of the Lords Committee responsible for the recent report on social mobility for young people) introduces his Private Members Bill intended to outlaw unpaid internships of four weeks or over
- **Preparing for the future.** The All Party Parliamentary Group for Education reminds respondents that evidence for its inquiry into how well schools prepare young people for their future careers needs to be in by Monday 13 June so that it can be on schedule to issue a report in November this year
- **No to resit SATs.** The Guardian asks some leading commentators for their thoughts on the government's plans to introduce resit SATs in English and maths from next year and struggles to find any support
- **Long delays here.** The Centre for Mental Health publishes a report on provision for children and young people suggesting that it can take anything up to ten years between a concern being raised and anything being done about it
- **Life Chances.** The Social Mobility Commission publish a new report looking at social disadvantage over time and noting that while some things have improved, more parents for instance are reading with their kids, persistent gaps in socio-economic disadvantage remain



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HE

- **Satisfaction not yet guaranteed.** HEPI (the HE Policy Institute) and HEA (the HE Academy) publish their latest annual survey of students' academic experience revealing that while many are happy with the course they're on, they don't always feel they're getting value for money and are concerned about the prospect of possible future fee increases
- **Opening up the data.** UCAS launches a mass of admissions data showing trends in admissions offers based on gender, background and ethnic group for 130 of the biggest universities
- **Making the case.** The government sets out the business cases behind the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI,) the two new core agencies for the HE sector outlined in the recent White Paper

FE/Skills

- **Levy double whammy.** The CITB confirms that some construction firms could end up having to pay both the government's levy which comes in from next April and its own sector levy due in, following further consultation, from 2018
- **Expert panels.** The Education sub Committee looking at education, skills and the economy hears evidence from a range of experts as to how apprenticeship developments are going and finds a mixed picture
- **Job Shadowing.** The Institute for Apprenticeships gains a new shadow chair in Anthony Jenkins (chief Exec of Barclays) and a new shadow chief operating officer in Nicola Bolton (UKTI)

Schools

- **Gifted and talented.** The Chief Inspector plunges into the issue of provision for the most able pupils in his latest monthly commentary calling for a return of national testing at KS3 and for schools who fail to cater adequately for the more able pupils to be prevented from setting up an academy trust
- **Teacher supply.** The Education Committee hears concerns about the length, value for money and the throughput of some teacher training as it hosts further witness sessions on teacher training
- **Capital costs.** The National Audit Office launches a new inquiry into the DfE's capital funding plans for schools pledging to report back this winter
- **Ofsted glare.** The inspectorate highlights concerns about the educational performance of some schools in the East Midlands and argues that against some indicators, it is one of the worst performing regions
- **Mind the A level gap.** New Schools Network publishes research indicating diminishing numbers of students taking A levels in some regions with numbers lowest in some of the more deprived boroughs
- **GCSE resits.** Ofqual affirms the resit arrangements for the legacy GCSEs with guaranteed resit opportunities for English, maths and science but for other subjects to be determined by awarding bodies
- **Understanding what works.** Teach First reports on some work carried out by The Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education (CUREE) on how some schools manage to tackle educational inequality and yet go on to achieve great results



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Tweet(s) of the week

- “As a team we need to break out of our individual silos. Right, you go first” - @managerspeak
- “I’m qualified to teach students not satisfy them” – @jenfleetwood
- “”You don’t need a maths degree to shop here...Sainsbury’s boss on removing the bogof barrier” - @Nat_Numeracy

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- ‘Gruffalo time.’ The time parents and carers spend with their children on developmental activities such as playing and reading

Quote(s) of the week

- “Leicester has enjoyed great sporting success and is home to the new champions of English football. Yet when it comes to education, its ambitions and achievements are decidedly second division” – Sir Michael Wishaw blows the whistle on educational standards in parts of the Midlands
- “A shocker” – Peter Scott, Professor of HE Studies at the London Institute, finds little to applaud in the government’s latest HE Bill
- “Essentially nothing has really changed” – Professor Alison Wolf gives her verdict on apprenticeship developments to the Education sub-Committee
- “I do feel that the brand is so toxic now that I think it’s got to go” – Andy Burnham MP calls for the Prevent strategy which places a duty on public bodies such as schools to report signs of radicalization, to be scrapped
- “Two thirds have less space to run around in than free range hens” – Dame Fiona Reynolds, master of Emmanuel College Cambridge, calls for children to be given more open spaces to play in
- “Calculate the exact number of days left until the end of term” – the Times Ed offers a number of mental games invigilators can play as they wile away the hours pacing exam halls

Number(s) of the week

- 2 weeks. How long the majority of students in the latest annual survey believe it should take to get their work marked and returned (only 31% reckon they do...get it back within 2 weeks)
- 12. The number of new Regius Professorships due to be awarded as part of the Queen’s 90th birthday celebrations (only 14 have been created over the last century)
- £30.9m. Estimated first year running costs of the new Office for Students (OfS)
- 2%. The rise in the number of people in Scotland taking up a modern apprenticeship helping the Scottish government reach its target of 25,500 by the end of March
- 9. The number of authorities where fewer than 20% of eligible students are taking A levels, according to research from the New Schools Network



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What to look out for next week

- My Money Week, bringing money management resources and activities into schools. (All week)
- Parentzone launches its new Digital Safeguarding training programme (Tuesday)
- Education Committee witness session on Multi-Academy Trusts (Wednesday)
- Sixth Form Colleges Association Summer Conference (Wed, Thursday)
- FE Minister Nick Boles speaks at the 'Transforming FE 2016' Conference (Wed)