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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 27 May 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

Some important stats, a big week for exams and MPs debate the current state of education and skills reform; those seem to be the big headlines from this week.

The stats have come from all corners: on this year's exam entries, on NEETs, on adult skills, on tuition fee projections, each helping build the bigger picture of how the education system is performing. On exams, for instance, the provisional data on this summer's entries released by Ofqual this week reveals a fairly stable picture of behaviour by schools and colleges despite recent reforms. Yes, entries for the new, de-coupled AS level are down (by 14%,) entries for EBacc subjects are generally up apart from for traditional foreign languages and fewer students are taking their GCSEs early following the introduction of the first early rule in 2013 but generally the picture is steady as she goes. Ofqual has just sent out a letter to all schools in England with an update on these and other related issues while for those who like to see the data in more detail, both [Schools Week](#) and [TES](#) have helpful summaries.

Other stats out this week include that on the latest quarterly NEET figures, (down by 0.6 percentage points but it's worth noting the Impetus-PEF new Youth Jobs Index also out this week and suggesting the real figures could be higher,) the latest quarterly apprenticeship starts (confirmed at 251,000 since last September) and some interesting projections on how HE tuition fees may shape up in the light of inflation and Teaching Excellence incentives in an article on [Wonkhe](#).

On testing and exams, after another heavy week, two developments have grabbed the headlines.

First, it's back to Ofqual, where the exams regulator has responded to its earlier consultation on marking reviews, appeals and grade boundaries by outlining some changes both for this summer and the future. The issue of appeals has attracted particular attention over recent months: is the system fair, are too many being lodged, is gaming going on, and in an effort to 'balance the playing field,' Ofqual has announced that 'only when there is a clear marking error,' can marks be changed. The decision has provoked further debate and is likely to remain under the spotlight this summer. And the other notable development this week has been the 'Dear Nicky' letter from the NAHT, calling on the Secretary of State to hold off on the formal publication of the 2016 SATs data in the light of ongoing concerns. At the same time, the Association is setting up a new Review Group to look at the whole issue of Key Stage assessment.

Finally this week, MPs debated education and skills following the announcements in the previous week's Queen's Speech. The full debate can be read [here](#) and requires considerable stamina with the development of 'robust criteria' for underperforming authorities and the renewed focus on technical education emerging as at least two important outcomes.

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Top headlines this week

- ‘Tackle pupil attainment gap in northern England, IPPR urges.’ ([Monday](#))
- ‘Pace of maths GCSE reforms has led to 7-day working, subject leaders warn.’ ([Tuesday](#))
- ‘Head teachers say cancel primary test results.’ ([Wednesday](#))
- ‘Online degree units to cut tuition fees.’ ([Thursday](#))
- ‘Exams appeal change could make it tougher to challenge results.’ ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Smaller, leaner BIS](#). The BIS Dept confirms the latest stage in its 2020 modernisation plans that will see the Sheffield office closed by 2018, new regional business centres established and a new policy ‘hub’ created in Whitehall
- [Ready when you are](#). The Chair of the Education Committee urges the Education Secretary to publish the proposed new Education for All Bill soon so that the Committee can start scrutinizing it
- [Counting the cost](#). The cross Party group of MPs which has been looking at financial education in schools calls for lessons on money management to be better embedded in the curriculum and crucially for these to start in primary school, in its latest report
- [Safeguarding](#). The government makes a number of small changes such as extending checks to those who have lived or worked abroad as it updates its ‘Keeping Children Safe in Education’ policy
- [More NEET](#). Impetus-PEF, the charity which supports young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, publishes new research from the Learning and Work Institute suggesting NEET levels tend to be higher than those given in official figures
- [Academies, what are they good for?](#) Warwick Mansell publishes a further briefing on Academies for the Cambridge Primary Review looking in particular at how the case for enhanced quality and autonomy stacks up
- [Children in care](#). As the government’s review of youth justice draws to a close, the Prison Reform Trust publishes a report indicating that far too many children in care are being prosecuted for minor transgressions
- [ELT market stalls](#). New stats published by English UK showing a drop in enrolments suggest a need for the UK English Language Teaching market to cultivate new markets if it is to retain its leading position

HE

- [The ups and downs of tuition fees](#). The Deputy Editor of Wonkhe maps out some future projections on tuition fees following the White Paper and argues that fees may become the focal point for political debate in the coming months



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- [Pick and mix?](#) Leeds University claims a breakthrough in online learning as it prepares to offer an online component in a traditional degree programme from this autumn hinting that in time students may be able to choose content and delivery and, significantly, cut costs
- [More university rankings.](#) Cambridge, Oxford, St Andrews, Surrey and Loughborough make up the top five UK universities in the Guardian's 2017 ranking published this week
- [What works?](#) QAA publishes 14 case studies of good practice in a number of key delivery areas culled from its latest round of institutional reviews
- [Tackling inequality.](#) The University Alliance group recommends a continuing strong role for OFFA and greater collaborative outreach work with schools and communities in a new report which includes case study evidence of how some universities are going about tackling issues of inequality
- [Keeping Schtum?](#) The HE Policy Institute publishes the latest survey from Youth Sight on student attitudes to free speech, safe spaces and related issues and finds some strong and changing attitudes
- [Tips on how to flip.](#) Three University of Essex lecturers offer some tips to the Guardian's higher education network on how to make the flipped learning model work successfully stressing the importance of online quizzes and feedback to help keep student enthusiasm up

FE/Skills

- [World-class apprenticeship standards.](#) Pearson publishes research conducted by the University of Derby on what constitutes world-class standards in apprenticeships and how these can best be applied to the system in England
- [English and maths stats.](#) The government publishes the latest data on those 16-18 yr olds needing to continue English and maths beyond age 16 showing improvements in English but not in maths
- [Future funding.](#) The Education and Training Foundation confirms its grant funding for the 2016/17 year with the lion's share for support on English and maths, Functional skills and apprenticeships
- [Restructuring costs.](#) The government issues guidance and forms for colleges that wish to apply for restructuring costs following an area review
- [Careers satisfaction.](#) The Skills Funding Agency publishes its latest report on the progress and satisfaction levels for the National Careers Service suggesting a long haul

Schools

- [Marking and appeals.](#) Ofqual announces some changes following its earlier consultation intended to ensure clearer decision making, greater transparency, more availability of scripts and new rules for appeals
- [Exam entries.](#) Ofqual publishes the latest stats on exam entries for this summer showing a slight drop in entries at GCSE and A level and a more marked drop in entries for AS
- [Dear headteacher.](#) Ofqual writes to schools outlining awarding and other arrangements for the rest of the exam season
- [Assessment matters.](#) The NAHT calls on the government not to publish this year's SATs results in the light of continuing concerns and announces a new Review Group to look at the whole issue of assessment from KS1 – KS3



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- **Northern weighting.** The think tank IPPR follows up its earlier work on schools in the North by publishing a report with Teach First calling among other things for the new national funding formula to recognize the funding disparities Northern schools currently face
- **SATs sat.** The government publishes this year's maths, reading and writing tests for all to see
- **Critically aware.** Childnet and the London Grid for Learning publish a resource pack to help primary and secondary schools develop critical skills when online

Tweet(s) of the week

- "Teachers who mispronounce students' names are having a negative impact on their learning" - [@Independent](#)
- "Sir Michael Wilshaw's perfect teacher? Part Rocky, part Henry V, part Mrs Doubtfire" - [@tes](#)
- "Lord Sugar's appointment will do wonders to dispel misconceptions that apprenticeships should be like the Apprentice" - [@BenVerinder](#)

Word or phrase(s) of the week

- 'The attitude ladder.' A way of avoiding exam stress by focusing on the top (positive) rungs rather than the lower (negative) rungs

Quote(s) of the week

- "Tuition fees are the percussion session of the higher education policy orchestra" – David Morris, Deputy Editor of Wonkhe argues that when it comes to HE reform, tuition fees make the loudest noise
- "I'll be travelling the length and breadth of this country to tell young people why apprenticeships are a great way for them to build their skills" – Lord Sugar returns as the government's enterprise tsar
- "I pledge an apprenticeship for every young person who wants on" – Andy Burnham sets out his stall as he bids to become Mayor of Greater Manchester
- "They often come in thinking they can't, they won't and they don't" – how young people taking GCSE maths resits often feel according to Association of College research
- "It's a big job in an important organization" – David Hughes on his appointment from this September as chief executive of the Association of Colleges
- "A maverick with a purpose" – Sir Michael Wilshaw's verdict on Sir Michael Wilshaw
- "Teachers often have to make a decision between what they think is appropriate for a pupil and what the consequences might be for the school's rating" – Former Education Secretary Estelle Morris reflects on the dilemmas increasingly facing teachers
- "I think it's a message of hope: it says I too can grow up. I too can unfold my talent and fly into the world" – the author of the children's favourite 'the Very Hungry Caterpillar' which is being turned into a musical



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Number(s) of the week

- 68%. The number of students in a recent survey from HEPI/YouthSight who believe lecturers should issue advance warning notices to students if they're going to discuss sensitive subjects so that they can have the opportunity to opt out
- 1.3m. The 'real' number of 16-24 yr olds spending at least 6 months out of work, education or training according to new figures published by Impetus - PEF
- 91%. The retention rate for school sixth forms in 2014/15, the last time the measure will be published in this way with the new 16-19 headline measures due to be used for 2016 performance
- £4,600. The per pupil funding amount for primary schools in the North, £900 less than for primary schools in London according to a report from IPPR
- £5m. How much the new global education prize being put up by the Chinese tech entrepreneur Chen Yidan, will be worth
- £2.6bn. How much is hoping to be raised for a new education fund being launched by the World Humanitarian Summit and overseen by Gordon Brown to help provide education and support for young people in global warzones
- £23m. The government grant to the Education and Training Foundation for 2016/17

What to look out for next week

- Parliamentary Whitsun recess (all week)
- Sir Michael Barber hosts the launch of a report on 'Dynamic Learning' by Charlie Leadbeater (Wed)