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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 1 December 2017

(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

A lot to take in this week including the Social Mobility Commission's latest and rather bleak annual 'state of the nation' report, the government's new Industrial Strategy, the DfE's first Skills Summit, a T level consultation and important reports on assessment, English/maths resits, Arts grads and 2017 uni entry.

Links to these and more below but here's a few of the top headlines.

The [Industrial Strategy](#) was first out of the traps this week, hard on the heels of the Budget and with many of the same details. This isn't the first such Strategy and may not be the last but is potentially the most important given the need to carve out a new industrial future beyond Brexit and at the forefront of the wider so-called 4th industrial revolution. Many of the issues have been raised at the DfE's inaugural [Skills Summit](#) this week where the government has re-emphasised the importance of T-levels, opened bids for Institutes of Technology and resurrected the Skills Pledge concept with employers.

As for the Strategy itself, it builds on an earlier Green discussion Paper and covers similar ground but in terms of stand-outs, there are perhaps three. First it recognises the core issue of productivity along with future challenges with its five foundations of productivity and four Grand Challenges. Second, there's a lot on education and skills, not all new, but thankfully without the disruption of too much furniture changing. Yes, there're Skills Advisory Panels and Local Industrial Strategies but the machinery of education provision goes on as before. And third, the government appears to be adopting a more hands-on role partly through partnerships such as the Sector Deals but also through the creation of a new advisory body, the Industrial Strategy Council, as well as through a PM chaired Cabinet Committee.

There are of course issues, the [FT](#) for instance outlined four challenges (Brexit, productivity, skills, digitalisation and technology) but in the words of [The Guardian headline](#): 'this white paper on industrial strategy is good news (mostly.)'

Less good news this week has been the annual [report](#) from the Social Mobility Commission. It uses its Social Mobility Index of 16 indicators to show just how deep some of the divisions across the country actually are. This is the Commission's fifth such report and it's worrying to see little sign of improvement especially for young people. There's a lot for education as well as for other services to reflect on in here.

Finally, briefly, that [report](#) on assessment. It's the culmination of major piece of work commissioned by Pearson and led by LKMco and helps set the context for an important issue at an important time. The 'if I had a magic wand' pieces are especially revealing.



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Top headlines this week

- 'UK Industrial Strategy aims to tackle productivity problems.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Social mobility: the worst places to grow up poor.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Early Excellence pulls out of bid for 'unworkable' Reception baseline test.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Most teachers lack confidence in assessing pupils.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Children as young as two grouped by ability in English nurseries.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Fit for the Future](#). The government published its wide ranging Industrial Strategy White Paper built around a number of productivity mechanisms, sector deals and long-term challenges all ultimately intended to ensure the UK is fit for a post Brexit future and able to ensure growth and living standards across the country
- [Skills Summit](#). The DfE hosted an initial Skills Summit bringing leading employers together to sign up to an action plan intended to transform skills development in this country
- [More skills for the future](#). The Government Office for Science offered its thoughts on future skill challenges listing five (poor literacy/numeracy, work-preparedness, skill mismatches, low skills equilibrium, lifelong learning) that may ultimately prove critical
- [And more on skills for the future](#). NESTA hosted a major event bringing together leading figures in education, policy, technology and elsewhere to examine the impact of its recent major report with Pearson on 2030 skills and future implications for learning and development
- [Economic Outlook](#). The OECD published its latest Outlook report suggesting that growth across OECD countries had 'picked up' generally but will be slower in the UK in 2018 and 2019 due to 'continuing uncertainty'
- [Social Mobility Annual Report](#). The Social Mobility Commission published its fifth annual 'state of the nation' report on social mobility highlighting sharp social divides across different regions in the country and calling for a national ten-year plan targeted at local 'cold spots' to help remedy the situation
- [Possible scarring](#). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IfS) examined whether trying to enter the labour market when things are tough economically speaking can lead to scarring effects such as low pay and poor conditions for young people, suggesting that this can happen especially in the initial years of work and especially for those not able to rely on parents

HE

- [End of Cycle Report](#). UCAS published the first of what this year will be a series of reports on how the 2017 HE admissions cycle went and what the data tells us, in this instance confirming that while there'd been a slight drop in the overall number of UK entrants, UK 18 yr olds along with international students have continued to enter in record numbers



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- **Let's hear it for the Arts and Humanities.** The British Academy published new research showing that many arts, humanities and social sciences graduates often do very well in terms of employment and actually have the sorts of skills, such as communication and collaboration, that employers seek
- **Dyson campus.** Jo Johnson, the Universities Minister, cut the first turf for the new undergraduate village in Wiltshire being built to accommodate students at the Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology from next September
- **International perspective.** Paul Raybould of QS Solutions formerly Hobson's Solutions, reported on the HEPI website on their recent survey of international students considering studying in the UK, Australia and New Zealand, noting that while the UK still remains an attractive option for many, value for money and modes of study are increasingly becoming factors

FE/Skills

- **T level consultation.** The government published its consultation with some 40+ questions around the design, development and potential implementation of T levels which it's hoping to start seeing introduced as an alternative route to A' levels from September 2020
- **Institutes of Technology Prospectus.** The launched its long awaited Prospectus showing what criteria it's looking for in bids to become Institutes of Technology with the first ones due to be confirmed in 2018 and to open in 2019
- **English and maths GCE resits.** The DfE reported on some commissioned research around what works best in helping students with resits and found no single, simple solution but plenty of tips such as shorter, more frequent lessons, levelled rather than mixed ability classes and clear diagnostic systems
- **Health check.** Ofsted published its latest set of inspection data for all FE and skills providers covering the period up to August 2017, showing 15% as outstanding, 64% as good and 18% as requiring improvement
- **The Commissioner's role.** The DfE outlined how the extended role of the FE Commissioner and his team is intended to operate particularly given the focus on earlier engagement and diagnostic assessment
- **Better Apprenticeships.** The Sutton Trust examined how far apprenticeships provided opportunities for social mobility and progression concluding that these were limited in many cases particularly as some two-thirds of apprenticeships are conversions of existing jobs and skills and there appears to be little incentive to improve either progression or quality
- **Don't panic-yet.** An Opinion piece in the FT reflected on the recent set of figures showing a drop in the take-up of apprenticeships suggesting that there was no need to panic at least yet, instead this should be seen as an opportunity to iron out some of the wrinkles arising from a dash for growth and focus on quality aspects
- **End-point Assessment Organisations.** The Education and Skills Funding Agency published updated information for employers and others intending to use the register of approved organisations

Schools

- **Better assessment.** LKMco and Pearson reported on their year-long inquiry into assessment, both currently and for the future, making a number of important recommendations particularly around training, support and time for teachers, on accountability and on the reporting of data



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- **Does it help to have a sixth-form?** Researchers School Dash added further detail to a long-standing debate, concluding that having a sixth form doesn't necessarily raise results at GCSE for a school but does tend to encourage more students to stay on an academic path in the long run
- **Computer science GCSE.** Ofqual launched a consultation on some proposed changes to the non-exam assessed task of GCSE computer science, potentially to take effect from next summer and in response to concerns raised this summer, which could include the task being taken but not counting towards the final grade
- **An expert explains.** Dale Bassett, head of curriculum strategy at AQA, offered some thoughts on what we've learned from the application of new GCSE grades this year and what to look out for next year
- **Bold beginnings.** Ofsted reported on its recent review of Reception year provision to see how far it was preparing four and five-year olds for the next stages in their life particularly school and found that most schools were working hard to prepare children with a strong focus on reading and recognition of the importance of play but more attention needed to be given to early maths
- **Reporting procedures.** Ofsted invited comments on three proposed changes to statistical reporting of inspection outcomes for maintained schools and academies such as for example, including the grade of the predecessor for new schools that haven't been inspected yet
- **ASK Us.** The BBC became the first big employer to invite teachers and young people in schools to use the online Apprenticeships Support and Knowledge (ASK) service to connect with apprentices and managers in the workplace, in this case at the BBC, to hear what it's really like to be or to have an apprentice
- **Examining SEND.** The Education Policy Institute (EPI) launched its year-long inquiry into SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) being funded by the Nuffield Foundation, with some initial data showing that on average this could involve four in ten children at some stage
- **Online mental health support.** The Education Policy Institute reported on how the Kooth online counselling service in particular was working for young people ahead of an expected government Green Paper on children's mental health

Tweets(s) of the week

- "Career paths aren't straight lines. There's nothing wrong with taking twists and turns. Professor Sir John Holman" - [@RoySocChem](#)
- "Not for me to comment on individual salaries. But we have more world-class universities than any other country bar America. Could be if we want to stay that way we need to pay vice-chancellors world-class salaries" - [@afneil](#)
- "Independent schools can use their independence to be the canaries in the education policy mine – but not if they go down side streets like Pre-U and iGCSE" - [@johndunford](#)
- "Britain is a divided nation but great teachers and great schools can help close the social mobility gap- chief exec [@russellhobby](#)" - [@TeachFirst](#)
- "The average child in the UK spends half as much time playing outside as their parents did when they were young, according to the National Trust" - [@CLOtC](#)



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Other stories of the week

- Well respected profession. There have been numerous surveys over the years about which profession is the most or least respected and it's good to know that teachers generally come out highly. In the latest British Social Attitudes Survey cited by the TES, teachers came in third, behind doctors and armed forces and just ahead of the police. A link to the report is [here](#)
- It's for you. There's been a lot on skills and productivity recently and in particular why productivity is so sluggish in the UK. Many theories have been advanced including low skill levels, excessive regulation, poor management and so on but a new theory has now been put forward by an analyst at the Bank of England. Apparently, our drop in productivity coincides with the arrival of tablets and social media which are proving a great distraction to work. Once you reach for your phone to view the latest message or photo it can take 25 minutes to get your head back on the job again. A link to the article, behind the Sunday Times paywall, is [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "More than just a set of announcements, it heralds a new approach to how government and business can work together" – the Prime Minister introduces the new Industrial Strategy
- "As the UK's first minister for digital when I meet people they tend to ask one of two things. Broadband or whether robots are going to take over the world" – Matt Hancock on the trials and tribulations of being the UK's Digital Minister
- "We are on a mission to fix Britain's skills problem" – the Education Secretary launches the inaugural Skills Summit
- "Tinkering with change will not do the trick" – the Social Mobility Commission calls for concerted action to tackle the growing social division identified in its latest annual report
- "They should damn well get off their backsides and work harder to get them those GCSEs" – Sir Michael Wilshaw continues his affair with colleges this time over GCSE resits
- "A range of different minimum levels of pupil funding were proposed (in the funding consultation) but the most commonly suggested levels for secondary schools was £4,800" – Nick Gibb answers a question on Parliament on the per pupil funding minimum
- "This is a ridiculous policy causing damage to the self-esteem of learners and increasing the already excessive workloads of teachers and lecturers" – the National Education Union (NEU) offers a few thoughts on English and maths GCSE resits
- "I couldn't cope with her going to school and then coming back so stressed out, so angry at me" – a parent explains why she has resorted to home schooling as Parliament debates this growing issue

Number(s) of the week

- 2bn. The number of people around the world likely to be over the age of 60 by 2050 according to data in the Industrial Strategy
- 1.2% and 1.1%. Projected growth for the UK economy for 2018 and 2019 respectively according to the OECD's latest Economic Outlook (the Chancellor had forecast 1.4% and 1.3% for 2018 and 2019 in his Budget last week)



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- £725m. How much the government is investing in the new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, according to the latest Industrial Strategy White Paper
- 241,500. The number of UK 18 yr olds accepted for uni entry this year, a record, according to latest figures from UCAS
- £1.7bn. How much the government is expected to raise from its sale of the pre-2012 student loan 'book,' considerably lower than hoped for according to the FT
- £8.39bn. How much was 'loaned out' in HE tuition fees for 2016/17, according to provisional figures from the Student Loans Company
- £250m. How much Oxford university is hoping to raise from the launch of its first ever bond
- 67,985. The number of GCSE exam entries in November, mostly for English and/or maths, according to Ofqual, down overall given the November series is now restricted to those aged 16 by the end of the preceding August
- 392,955. The number of access arrangements approved for GCSE and A/AS exams this year, up 5% on the previous, and largely in the form of extra time according to Ofqual
- 105,000. How many more secondary school places will be needed in London schools by 2025, with an extra 60,000 at primary, according to the London Assembly
- 27,895. The number of people starting or expecting to start a postgrad Initial Teacher Training course this year, up from 26,70 the year before according to latest DfE figures
- 36%. How many disadvantaged pupils on average in England achieve the benchmark A*-C in GCSE English and maths, according to the Social Mobility Commission
- 89%. The proportion of good or outstanding schools inspected over the last year according to Ofsted
- 94. The number of areas across the country where fewer than half of the disadvantaged children are school ready at age five, according to the Social Mobility Commission
- £1.3bn. How much schools spent on supply teachers in 2015/16 according to quoted in Parliament and reported by the TES

What to look out for next week

- Education Committee witness session with School Commissioners (Tuesday)