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Policy Eye



Highlights of week ending Friday 25 May 2018

(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.

Keynote speeches by the PM and Chancellor on the Industrial Strategy, sharp debate about the student intake at Oxford University, a report on Ofsted inspections, an update on exam entries and new research on grammar schools, let alone a couple of big exam days of English and maths. A heavy week for many.

The Industrial Strategy first which many employers are keen to see take off as the needs of the post-Brexit economy become more real. The British Chambers of Commerce [penned](#) an open letter to the government this week urging it to take action and there's certainly been some of that over the week.

In a leading speech on Monday, the Prime Minister set each of the four Grand Challenges in the Strategy an ambitious 'mission' for the future. AI and data were for instance 'to transform the prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of chronic diseases by 2030' while the Ageing Society Challenge was to make sure that by 2035, people were able to enjoy an extra five years of healthy, independent living. Along with investment in science and research, and the promise of continued international collaboration post-Brexit, the speech convinced David Willetts at least to [wax lyrical](#). Two days later the Chancellor pitched in with a speech to the CBI highlighting apprenticeships ('we're listening about the levy') and T levels ('we're investing over £500m pa,') and outlining plans to improve infrastructure, particularly full-fibre networks and productivity. The Strategy continues to offer an essential route map for the economy for the future.

Off to Oxford University next which this week published its first [statistical report](#) on its student intake. It took the opportunity also to announce that more disadvantaged students would benefit from the extra funding for its UNIQ spring and summer schools but most of the attention was focused on whether it was actually doing enough to attract under-represented groups. The report contains a fair amount of data on admissions by course, region and background which has been helpfully analysed by [Wonkhe](#) but by its own admission, the University acknowledges it is moving 'perhaps too slowly to meet public expectations.' A well timed [report](#) by HEPI on what makes Oxbridge different offers a useful context to the whole debate.

Finally some headlines from the latest reports and research this week, three in particular.

First, Ofsted inspections which according to a National Audit Office report have been facing difficulties resulting from cuts to staff and resources. Second, this summer's exam entries which according to provisional figures from Ofqual point to further drops in the take-up at AS level and in some English A' level subjects though not STEM subjects, and an increase in entries for some EBacc subjects, notably separate sciences. And third, 'Gaining entry into a grammar school may actually not be as important as many assume.' So concluded London Institute researchers in an interesting new study published this week.



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Top headlines this week

- 'Greenwich University fined £120,000 for data breach.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Hinds needs a good shaking over skills.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Expanding grammars unlikely to benefit pupils.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Ofsted admits some outstanding schools aren't that good.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'AoC proposes restriction on apprenticeship funding.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Mission possible](#). The Prime Minister confirmed funding support and continued international collaboration post-Brexit for science and R/D in a keynote speech re-purposing the Industrial Strategy's four Grand Challenges around specific missions for the future
- [Mission critical](#). The Chancellor addressed employers at the CBI Annual Dinner where he outlined new targets for full-fibre connectivity, a Call for Evidence on productivity issues and a continued focus on developing skills and talent
- [Internet safety](#). The government published a response to its earlier consultation on internet safety confirming that it will now work with a range of other partners to develop a more formal White Paper later this year as a prelude to legislation intended to tackle such as issues as cyberbullying, online child sexual exploitation and illegal content
- [Social Justice Commission Bill](#). Chair of the Education Committee Robert Halfon MP used the Ten Minute Rule procedure to introduce a new Bill designed to change the name of the Social Mobility Commission to the Social Justice Commission and to grant it new powers and resources
- [Government response on Social Mobility](#). The government issued its response to the proposals on the Social Mobility Commission put forward by the Education Committee rejecting the need to change its name or its powers and proposing Dame Martina Milburn as its preferred candidate as Chair
- [Business Productivity review](#). The government launched a further Call for Evidence as part of its Industrial Strategy focusing this time on the sorts of business factors that can affect productivity, with responses expected to help inform the Treasury ahead of the next Budget
- [Improving Literacy](#). Project Literacy, the global movement founded by Pearson and aiming to ensure no child is born at risk of poor literacy by 2030, published its latest Annual Report indicating that 7m people had been helped so far and listing a range of actions being undertaken this year

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- [Glittering prizes](#). Oxford University published its Admissions Statistical report covering the period 2013-2017 showing what it called 'evolving progress' in attracting more disadvantaged and diverse students but facing questions about whether it should be doing more
- [How different is Oxbridge?](#) The HE Policy Institute (HEPI) examined student survey evidence to find out just what makes Oxbridge special or different, reporting high levels of satisfaction, work and enjoyment



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of the experience by students but equally high levels of resources, commitment and in some cases, exclusiveness

- [Postgrad outcomes data](#). The government published new data on post grad employment and earnings income for 2015/16 showing broadly median earnings rising from the year after graduation but different patterns of employment
- [Regional divides](#). The Press Association presented a new analysis of recent UCAS data, showing the gap in take-up of degree places between students coming from London and those from the North East which in high-ranking subjects like medicine and maths was 20+ points

FE/Skills

- [Funding Band Review](#). The Institute for Apprenticeships confirmed that work was under way to review the funding bands for 31 standards already approved for delivery, with the prospects of reductions in some cases
- [T level timescale](#). The Education Secretary confirmed in internal correspondence that he intended to stick with the current timescale for introducing T levels suggesting that despite concerns it was both important and doable
- [T level providers](#). The Skills Minister confirmed that providers who submitted expressions of interest to offer the first T levels in 2020/21 would be formally notified of the results by the end of May

Schools

- [Exam entries](#). Ofqual published provisional figures for this summer's exam entries for GCSE, AS and A' level as of April showing a slight increase in GCSE and notably EBacc subject entries, a big drop in AS entries and a slight drop in the number of some A' level entries
- [Exams noticeboard](#). Ofqual accompanied its release of exam entry data with a letter to schools reminding them of some of the important changes this summer including to A' level maths, GCSE science and Applied General and Tech levels
- [Ofsted inspections](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) published its report into Ofsted inspections suggesting that funding and staff cuts had made it difficult for Ofsted to meet its own targets on inspections especially on re-inspections of outstanding or inadequate schools
- [Ofsted responds](#). Ofsted issued a formal response to this week's NAO report on school inspections arguing that it's doing what it can within a difficult financial climate, believes that it has the balance right and has addressed most of the concerns
- [Grammar school debate](#). Researchers from UCL's Institute of Education looked at a range of evidence culled from formal tests and questionnaires to assess whether those who had been to grammar school were ahead of those that hadn't by age 14, concluding that they weren't
- [Lesson observations](#). Ofsted reported on its international seminar held last autumn looking at different models of lesson observation as it develops its own approach for the new inspection framework
- [Bringing back control](#). The Local Government Association (LGA) called on the government either to take a closer grip on Academy finances or pass the buck to local councils to ensure better transparency and oversight



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- **SEN and EHC plans.** The government published latest data on Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans for young people over the last year showing an 11.3% increase on the previous year
- **Mixing it up.** Researchers from Bristol University and the LSE reported on ethnic diversity in English secondary schools noting that pupils in schools with greater ethnic mix tended to be much more supportive and understanding towards each other than schools without the same level of mix
- **The tide is turning.** RSA Director Julian Astle reflected in a new blog on the Education Secretary's recent school accountability speech, suggesting that it, and other work from Ofsted, ASCL and NAHT among others, pointed to a shift away from heavy-handed systems of school accountability
- **Maths mission.** NESTA and Tata, the two organisations leading the maths mission project dedicated to developing an interest if not love for maths and problem solving, published survey results showing increasing numbers not only enjoy maths but feel they can also become better at it as well

Tweets(s) of the week

- "What kind of sadists set exams in the most beautiful months of May and June?" - [@tesfenews](#)
- "Students could be paid more than £1000 as compensation for missed lectures – CoventryLive" - [@jim_dickinson](#)
- "The first rule of schools: everybody – literally everybody, thinks that their catchment area is more deprived than people realise" - [@MichaelT1979](#)
- "I notice that many people who comment on what teachers should/shouldn't do in schools, don't teach in schools. Maybe they should give it a try and see how it works day in and day out in the average classroom" - [@EnserMark](#)
- "Through my #education, I didn't just develop skills, I didn't just develop the ability to learn, but I developed confidence. Great #Monday Motivation from Michelle Obama" - [@SouthThamesColl](#)
- "Back in the day when I used to get a lot of INSET, it was in teachers' centres. Those were mostly all shut down. Now it is all about 'regional hubs.' Places people receive extra training aren't new, they've just changed names, and provision is a lot more patchy" - [@HeyMissSmith](#)

Other stories of the week

- Glass half full? The think tank Demos is currently leading a major project challenging the current mood of pessimism and despair felt by many in society. Under the heading of 'the Optimism Project,' it is aiming, in its words 'to restore a sense of national purpose, unity and optimism to our divided country.' This week with the insight company Opinium, it published some initial research into what makes us feel optimistic. It pointed to a much more positive picture of society than that which is often reported in the media. For example, when asked about the best things in life in this country, people said in order: free healthcare; heritage; free education system. There are plenty of other good vibes in the report which can be found [here](#)



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Quote(s) of the week

- “When we leave the European Union, I will ensure that does not change” – the PM promises continued international collaboration in science and R/D post Brexit
- “On my very first day at primary school, the headmistress had to literally carry me, kicking and screaming into the classroom” – the Prime Minister draws no conclusions with the House of Commons but tells a teachers’ reception about her difficult start in education
- “At the same time I have been clear that we have to address the Wild West elements of the Internet through legislation, in a way that supports innovation” – The Culture Minister pledges to get to grips with internet safety
- “I recognize the new levy system presents some challenges” – the Chancellor tries to reassure employers that he’s listening
- “The Swiss system last embarked on reform in 2007”- the new Chief Exec of the Federation of Awarding Bodies, Tom Bewick, reflects on the constant policy churn in the English skill system
- “I am confident that Ofsted gets the balance right” – Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman responds to the this week’s NAO report on Ofsted school inspections
- “This is the biggest move in education for 300 years. The government hasn’t begun to understand what it can do with AI in education” – but Sir Anthony Seldon has in his latest book on AI
- “Three years into their time at secondary school, grammar pupils have similar levels of engagement and self-confidence in school, aspirations and expectations for the future, and socio-emotional outcomes as their matched non-grammar peers” – UCL researchers report little difference between state and grammar school pupils at age 14

Number(s) of the week

- +3%. The increase in the number of manufacturing business surveyed who said their output over the last 3 months was up, the lowest number for two years according to the CBI’s latest Industrial Trends survey
- 58.2%. The number of state school students admitted to Oxford colleges last year, against a national average of 81%, according to latest data published by the University
- 25.8%. The proportion of 16-19 yr olds who having failed to achieve a L2 qualification in English and maths at age 16 managed to achieve both by age 19 over 2016/17, an increase of 1.5% according to latest government figures
- £7,200. The estimated average cost of an Ofsted school inspection currently, according to the National Audit Office
- (Almost) 60%. The fall in the number of AS level exam entries between 2017 and 2018, according to latest figures from Ofqual
- £667m. The likely cost by 2030 in online fraud resulting from the practice of ‘sharenting,’ when proud parents share pictures and images of their families on social media, according to Barclays Bank

What to look out for next week

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Week ending Friday 25 May 2018



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- Parliamentary recess and half term (for many)
- BBC 2 programme on grammar schools (Tuesday)
- OECD report on 'Building a 21st c school system' (Tuesday)