

Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 3 May 2019



(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 and still coming, with the Education Secretary due to speak this afternoon at the National Association of Head Teachers' (NAHT) Conference.

As for the week in general, in no particular order we've had a fairly bleak prognosis on social mobility in the latest Commission [report](#), the first of what's intended to be a series of [funding Papers](#) from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) ahead of the Spending Review, looking on this occasion at post-18 funding with 16-19 and schools to follow, the latest session of [education questions](#) to DfE Ministers with issues of funding, school exclusions and international students all prominent, an Education Committee [session](#) on school system accountability, and a sprinkling of Ministerial speeches.

Throw in a new [Business Plan](#) and [briefing on university admissions](#) from the Office for Students, a heated [debate](#) about the charging of EU students post-Brexit, some interesting reflections on the [latest apprenticeship figures](#), a weighty [research report](#) from Ofqual and Oxford's Centre for Educational Assessment on linear v modular GCSEs, a stout [defence](#) from Ofsted of its 4-scale grading system for inspections, and a new [report](#) on work experience and you can see why there's such a lot to take in.

Here's a few pointers to help see the wood from the trees, starting with the Social Mobility report.

One sentence pretty much captures the essence of the latest Social Mobility Commission [report](#) and it's this; 'being born privileged still means you usually remain privileged.' Things in other words have hardly improved over recent years and the new look Commission team look particularly to education to help generate some momentum. There's criticism of some education reforms, Key Stage tests rushed in for instance, but also welcome recognition that 16-19 learners and apprenticeships need a better deal.

Next EPI's [report](#), an important assessment of the issues said to have been under discussion as part of the long awaited post – 18 review report. Many of the rumoured proposals from variable fees to tariff limits, let alone fee cuts altogether would, the report argues, prove regressive. Instead the focus should be on targeted support including notably maintenance loans for those taking their first full L3 qualification.

Finally those Ofqual and Ofsted reports. Ofqual's is a detailed [study of the impact of modular v linear GCSE](#) exams, a core component of the Gove reforms. The report is reassuring in the sense that neither structure appears to affect disadvantaged students or boys and girls disproportionately. Caveats apart on exam burdens, the report concludes that 'linear are more suitable at GCSE than modular.' As for inspection grades, [Ofsted](#) recognises but rebuts criticisms and will keep things as they are, for now.

Top headlines this week

- 'EU students could face higher fees to study in the UK post 2020.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Social mobility in the UK virtually stagnant since 2014.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Universities told to be more flexible about students' A' level results.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'We'll make badly behaved pupils repeat a year, say academies.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Labour could replace SATs with PISA style sampling.' ([Friday](#))

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Education Questions](#). DfE Ministers confirmed that school exclusions should only be used as a last resort, that EU students were always welcome and that the Dept was putting 'a strong case' to the Chancellor extra funding, in response to Education Questions from MPs
- [Internationally speaking](#). The Education Secretary outlined the work the government and others were doing to strengthen international education but added little more on visas, in a Conference speech to promote the International Education Strategy
- [Latest Social Mobility Report](#). The Social Mobility Commission published its latest annual State of the Nation report pointing to little improvement over recent years with suggestions that class privilege remains 'entrenched,' and calling among other things for increased funding for all 16-19 provision with a special student premium for disadvantaged individuals in that age group
- [Children's Services](#). The Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee reported on what they felt was the dire state of funding for children's services, calling urgently for an injection of £3.1bn up to 2025 along with systemic changes on regulation, oversight and staff support
- [Gender stereotyping](#). The Fawcett Society launched a consultation on gender stereotyping as it announced a new Commission, to be jointly chaired by Professor Becky Francis and David Lammy MP, to challenge the issue of gender stereotypes in early childhood

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- [Funding post-18 education](#). The Education Policy Institute examined the issues around post-18 funding ahead of the anticipated Augar review arguing that many of the proposals said to have been under consideration such as reducing fees and/or interest rates tend to be regressive and arguing instead for a more targeted approach that would support p/t, mature and disadvantaged learners as well as those taking L3 vocational programmes
- [Year 2 Business Plan](#). The Office for Students published its latest Business Plan setting out its key objectives and outcomes for 2019-20 with access and participation, student protection, the TEF, response to Augar and value for money all listed
- [University admissions](#). The Office for Students published the latest in its series of Insight briefings looking on this occasion at university admissions and contextual data and the need to be more ambitious when assessing merit particularly in those from disadvantaged backgrounds



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- [Closing the BAME attainment gap](#). Universities UK in conjunction with the NUS reported on their work looking into the attainment gap experienced by black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students, listing five principles including changing the culture and understanding what works, for accelerating progress
- [Chasing the numbers](#). The Times Higher published an interesting comment piece on how different universities are/have been coping with the pressures of a competitive student market
- [Global Education Market survey](#). The Tribal organisation published its recent global education market survey noting that data consistency and accuracy along with funding remain the big challenges for UKHE with student recruitment/retention, teaching quality and student outcomes the priorities for Asia Pacific HE
- [Overqualified?](#) The Office for National Statistics (ONS) published new research into what it called 'over education in the UK labour market' suggesting that despite the graduate premium, some 16% of all those in employment in 2017 were over qualified for the job they were doing
- [EU student charges](#). BuzzFeed reported that the government was considering plans that could see future EU students having to pay the higher fees currently expected of non - EU international students
- [EU student charges \(2.\)](#) Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) defended the re-charging of EU students post Brexit in a comment piece on Conservativehome, arguing that post-Brexit. all international students, EU or not, should be treated equally

FE/Skills

- [Index linking](#). The government published its latest Skills Index report measuring the impact of skills training on productivity showing that while the value-added for apprenticeships has continued to rise, that for classroom-based training has continued to fall
- [Progress report](#). The DfE issued its progress report on apprenticeships covering the 2017/18 year and the first two quarters of 2018/19 indicating that they're just over half way to the 3m target but also pinpointing progress in other areas such as widening participation and sustained destinations
- [Latest apprenticeship figures](#). Analysts at the Resolution Foundation offered their regular helpful assessment of the latest apprenticeship figures underlining the continuing trend towards more higher-level starts and the implications of this on funding and age groups
- [Construction plans](#). The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) published its latest Business Plan setting out how it intended to meet the 'Big Six' skills challenges identified, using measures such as growing apprenticeships, helping SMEs and developing a site-ready workforce
- [Brexit issues](#). David Hughes, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, highlighted in a comment piece in the TES how Brexit delays were causing concern to colleges listing uncertainty over three issues (future funding levels, future apprenticeship reform and future landscape re-structuring) in particular
- [Support for colleges](#). The government outlined the latest list of individuals and organisations lined up to oversee and support FE and sixth-form colleges
- [Functional Skills](#). The Education and Training Foundation launched its toolkit, developed in collaboration with practitioners, to help providers apply phonics approaches with post-16 learners as they appear under the reformed Functional Skills



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Schools

- [Sticking with the grade](#). Ofsted tackled the issue of the 4-point grading system for inspections which has been the subject of much debate and some criticism for a while, putting forward a number of reasons such as providing accessible information for parents, as to why it intends to continue with the current system
- [What do parents think?](#) Ofsted published its latest YouGov annual Parents' Survey showing that awareness of Ofsted remains widespread and that along with talking to other parents, Ofsted remains the other main source of information for parents when choosing a childcare provider, school, or college
- [Exam reform](#). Ofqual reported on its major research work, conducted with Oxford University's Centre for Educational Assessment, into the impact of the 'Gove' GCSE exam reforms, concluding that despite caveats such as an alternate increase in mock exams, linear exams are 'more suitable' at GCSE than modular exams
- [Making work experience work](#). LKMco and Workfinder published a new report on work experience suggesting a number of ways in which it could be made more accessible, more authentic and more beneficial including notably increasing opportunities post-16 and spreading opportunities throughout the year
- [Centre of Excellence for child mental health](#). The Duchess of Cambridge opened the new school site for the Anna Freud Centre of Excellence for pupils taken out of mainstream education often for behavioural difficulties and who need specialist support
- [Smalltalk](#). The National Literacy Trust launched a new project with a website, dedicated resources and volunteer groups, to help parents support the development of their children's language skills in early years at home

Tweets(s) of the week.

- "New Post: Teachers are miserable because they're being held at gunpoint for meaningless data" - [@SchoolsImprove](#)
- "Told at a meeting today we should make the content of lessons 'irresistable' to students. This prompted a not very articulate explosion from me trying to point out what a bad idea that was which ended with the metaphor 'irresistable is a chocolate bar.' Not best effort but tried" - [@DerekJHopper1](#)
- "The march of the campus dogs continues: Stress-busting dogs get ID cards and join university staff" - [@seanjcoughlan](#)
- "Britain's strictest headteacher calls for abusive parents to be prosecuted" - [@ed_ontap](#)
- "Nearly one in four pupils have not drunk during school day to avoid using toilet" - [@Independent](#)
- "Nothing says "home worker" than reluctantly having your first shower at 4pm, for an evening engagement" - [@Sathnam](#)

Other stories of the week

- Passionate about work? For many people, one of the most over-used words in the English language at present is the word 'passionate.' Interview candidates, sports people, even Education Ministers all tend to claim to be passionate about the job in hand when asked. Passion has thus become a proxy for belief and commitment and it's become almost impossible to do a job without claiming to be passionate about

it. In an interesting article in the FT this week, the journalist Emma Jacobs argued that passion shouldn't be turned into a quasi-religious experience. Her article 'No passion please, we are British' can be found [here](#)

Quote(s) of the week

- "Being born privileged still means you usually remain privileged" – the Social Mobility Commission finds little has changed in its latest report
- "No amount of preparation can remove stress entirely; exams are inherently stressful" – The Education Secretary reflects on coping with stress as the exam season edges nearer
- "There isn't a spending department in Whitehall that doesn't want more money" – School Standards Minister Nick Gibb reports on the realities of the Spending Review
- "Fair access is often caricatured as a zero-sum game...but to see it in those terms is to miss the point. We are wasting talent, denying opportunity and hurting our economy by not making the most of our greatest asset - our people" – Sir Michael Barber introduces the Office for Students' new briefing on university admissions
- "We will not allow the narrative of the strength of our higher education system to excuse or condone poor quality provision where it arises" – Nicola Dandridge, Chief Exec of the Office for Students (OfS) sets out the thinking behind the OfS's Business Plan
- "We cannot change the past, but nor should we seek to hide from it" - Cambridge University's vice-chancellor announces a two-year review into potential links with slavery
- "While the treadmill of formal exams has reduced, the corresponding increase in mock exams means that assessment may still heavily feature in some students' educational experiences" – Ofqual reports on its comprehensive research into the recent GCSE exam reforms
- "I might work in a Victorian building but this is not Victorian Britain, and it shouldn't be a Victorian-style education that we give our children" – the new President of the National Association of Head Teachers reports from the frontline as a head of an infant school in West Yorkshire

Number(s) of the week

- £50m. How much the SEEK (investment) Group has invested in the OU's FutureLearn platform, according to a press release from the OU
- 34.2%. How many people who had graduated since 2007 were over qualified for the work they were currently doing, according to the Office for National Statistics
- 256,300. The number of apprenticeship starts for the period August 2018 to February 2019, slightly up on last year but down on the pre levy year, according to latest figures
- 73/100. How much skills training in FE was worth in terms of productivity for 2017/18 according to the government's latest FE Skills Index
- 89%. The number of parents who know the Ofsted rating of their child's care provider or primary school, according to Ofsted's latest Parents' Survey
- 28,910. The number of overseas pupils now in UK independent schools with a 3% increase in the number from EEA countries, according to the latest figures from the Independent Schools Council

What to look out for next week

- National Association of Head Teachers Annual Conference (Friday – Sunday, the Education Secretary addresses the Conference on Friday afternoon)
- QAA Annual Conference (Tuesday, Wednesday)