

Select Committee to question Ofqual

The Education Select Committee is to hold a one-off evidence session on the work of Ofqual.

Chief Regulator, Glenys Stacey, and the Chair of Ofqual, Amanda Spielman, will be questioned by the Committee on 14 October 2015. Prior to that, the Committee has invited short written submissions on the work of Ofqual in regulating examinations, including the reform of GCSEs and A Levels.

Chaired by Neil Carmichael, MP, the Education Select Committee scrutinises expenditure, administration and the policies of the Department for Education and associated public bodies.

Contact policy@ocr.org.uk for further information on OCR's written submission.

Further consultations on 2017 GCSE and A Level subjects

The Department for Education and Ofqual are inviting views on the proposed [content](#) and [assessment arrangements](#) of further GCSE and A Level subjects that will be ready for teaching from September 2017:

GCSE	GCE AS and A Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ancient history• Classical civilisation• Electronics• Film studies• Media studies• Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accounting• Ancient history• Archaeology• Classical civilisation• Electronics• Film studies• Law• Media studies• Statistics

Both consultations close on 5 November 2015.

There will be further consultation on the development of other GCSE and AS and A Level subjects at a later date.

Results trends 2015

2015 A Level and GCSE results remained stable this year as shifts in entry patterns impacted at subject level.

A Level results remained largely stable from 2014:

- The number of students achieving A* and A grades was down 0.1% to 25.9%
- 98.1% of grades were between A* to E - an identical proportion of passing grades to the prior year
- 850,749 A Levels were taken in total.

Results day revealed a move towards more 'traditional' A Level subject choices. The number of students studying maths for example has increased over 20% in the past 5 years, and among the STEM subjects, computing saw the biggest rise in exam entries, with a 29.1% increase since 2014. Mathematics remains the most popular A Level, with 10.9% of all entries. English is second with 10.5% and Biology third with 7.4%.

Also in this issue:

> Headteachers' views on EBacc > English and maths GCSE levy > Development standards for teachers
> Free schools > Career colleges > Constitution for schools > Post-16 area reviews > RQF > Apprenticeships levy
> Prison education review > Funding steering group > Graduate employment

Compared to 2014, A Level results showed entries have risen in:

- Computing - up by 29.1%
- Geography - up by 12.7%
- English literature - up by 7.1%
- History - up by 7.1%
- Further maths - up by 6.9%
- Maths - up by 4.4%
- Modern foreign languages - up by 3.8%.

These results translated into 409,000 students being accepted to universities on results day, up 3% against A Level results day in 2014. This is the highest number of acceptances recorded on A Level results day, and includes 362,000 students accepted to their first choice, again up by 3%.

Entries for the **Extended Project** - a qualification that develops skills in research and writing - increased marginally by 1% to 33,564, following years of rapid growth (39.3% increase in the last 5 years).

At a national level there was also very little change in this year's **GCSE** results:

- A* grades declined marginally by 0.1% to 6.6%, as did grades A*-A falling to 21.2%
- Grades A*-C increased 0.2% to 69%
- Overall, the number of GCSEs taken increased 1.2% to 5,277,604.

However, changes in educational policies had an effect on entry patterns and results at a subject level. This was particularly the case in English and mathematics – the only subjects in which resits are now available. Compared to 2014, 2015 figures showed GCSE entries rise in:

- Computer Science - up 18,641 (111.1%)
- Engineering - up 1,882 (37.4%)
- Science - up 20,523 (5.5%)
- Maths - up 24,827 (3.4%).

As expected, 16 year olds made up the greatest proportion of entries but as of this year, students in England who did not achieve a grade C in either maths or English continued to study that subject post-16, which explains the rise in entries from 17 year olds. Entries by 15 year olds dropped 13.4%, impacted by the 'first entry counts' policy, which was introduced in England in autumn 2013.

Detailed results statistics by A Level and GCSE subject, grade and gender are available on the [Joint Council for Qualifications website](#).

Headteachers oppose making EBacc GCSEs compulsory

The vast majority of headteachers are against a government decision to make it compulsory for pupils to take the academic GCSEs needed to fulfil the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) performance measure. This is the finding of the Association of School and College Leaders' (ASCL) [survey](#) of approximately 1,000 of its members.

The [reform](#), announced by Education Secretary Nicky Morgan in June, applies to pupils who started secondary school this September and means they must study English, maths, science, history or geography, and a language up to GCSE level. These students will sit their GCSEs in 2020.

ASCL's survey found that:

- 87% of its members disagree with the change
- About 10% support it.

Of those who oppose the proposal:

- 81% said that the range of subjects required was too inflexible

- 86% said it would leave less room for creative or vocational subjects
- About 97% said it would not suit every pupil
- 58% said the change amounted to an unfair performance measure.

However almost three-quarters of those who said they had concerns over the reform, agreed that more flexibility in the choice of subjects would make them more inclined to support it.

The survey also found that 74% of school leaders said that their school did not have enough teachers for the EBacc subjects, with languages causing the most difficulties.

The Head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has also questioned whether the EBacc will properly prepare every student for education after GCSEs, particularly those who want to undertake an apprenticeship.

Call for English and maths levy on schools

A resit levy should be applied to schools to cover the costs of some or all of their students who do not achieve A*-C in GCSE English or maths, concludes a report from think tank, Policy Exchange.

In *Crossing the Line: Improving success rates among students retaking English and maths GCSEs*, Policy Exchange argues that FE Colleges have to deal with the greatest proportion of young people that have to re-sit these qualifications in comparison to their school counterparts, and these are students who are likely to require more intensive teaching.

The numbers bear out the challenge for FE Colleges. For students who completed their GCSEs in 2011 and retook them in 2013:

- FE Colleges took five times more students than schools (54% compared to 10%) who retook English
- FE Colleges took almost five times more students (60% compared to 13%) than schools who retook maths

- 49% of students retaking English GCSE at an FE College received below a D grade compared to 30% of those retaking the exams at school and 31% retaking at sixth form college
- 66% of students retaking maths GCSE at an FE College received below a D grade compared to 47% of those retaking the exams at school and 47% retaking at sixth form college.

The paper says the 'resit levy' would only apply in the following instances:

- Where the student has both failed to get a C and achieved a negative score below a certain level on the new Progress 8 benchmark – to ensure schools are not penalised for making good progress with a pupil they took on at aged 11
- Where the pupil has been on the roll of the secondary school for a certain length of time – to ensure the school had sufficient time to teach the pupil
- Where the student has particular special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Professional development standards for teachers

The Teachers' Professional Development Expert Group is [seeking evidence](#) to inform a new standard for teachers' professional development (in England).

The Expert Group, chaired by David Weston, CEO of the Teacher Development Trust (TDT) and a former teacher, especially wants to hear from teachers, headteachers and providers of professional development about:

- What makes for effective professional development
- The types of professional development that work best
- The culture and environment in schools that best support it.

The new standard will be non-statutory and will aim to set out a clear description of effective practice in professional development for teachers. It will:

- Help teachers and providers of teacher training to understand aspects of good-quality professional development
- Clarify some common misconceptions
- Complement the existing 'Teachers' Standards'.

Responses to the call for evidence must be submitted by 16 October 2015.

Number of free schools continues to grow

A further 18 new free schools have been announced by the Government bringing the total places created by free schools to date to 236,000.

They will join the 252 already open and the 52 new free schools opening up their doors as schools headed back for the autumn term.

The Government has pledged to open 500 new free schools over the next 5 years in its commitment to "give parents more choice while challenging existing schools to up their game".

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has called on more groups to step forward to open a free school. To help them do that she has committed to streamlining the process for existing high performing schools and encouraging businesses, charities, cultural and sporting bodies to enter the programme.

Meanwhile, the Education Select Committee has raised concerns about the premises and planning systems required to build large numbers of new schools.

New career colleges to open

Six FE colleges are preparing to open ten new Career Colleges over the next two academic years, with the potential of another 15 to open by 2019.

Former Conservative Education Secretary Lord Baker first announced plans in October 2013 to create a series of [Career Colleges](#), focussing on training for students aged from 14 years old with each college specialising in a different sector and working directly with employers, at existing FE colleges. Five of these are to open this month:

- Barking and Dagenham College's Career College will specialise in digital and creative industries
- South Tyneside College's will offer advanced manufacturing, engineering and computer science
- Yeovil College's will cover health and care

- Harrow College will open two Career Colleges from the start of 2015-16 - one specialising in creative and digital industries, and the other in professional and business services.

These will join two Career Colleges that opened last September at London's Bromley College and Liverpool's Hugh Baird College, which specialise in catering and hospitality respectively.

Career Colleges take advantage of the Government's decision to allow FE colleges to recruit at 14. They aim to increase the range and choice of opportunities open to 14-19 year olds and provide accelerated vocationally-focused programmes of study alongside core academic work.

A national constitution for schools?

Recent research on school accountability and collaboration has called for a national constitution for schools.

A [report from the Fabian Society](#) - Britain's "oldest political think tank" - proposes that government should publish a national constitution for the school system in England, along the lines of the NHS constitution. The document would set out the rights, roles and responsibilities of children, parents, staff and the local community in the life of schools, in order to drive the next phase of education improvement.

The report says that we must rethink the environment in which schools operate and the way they achieve their outcomes, asking what success should look like in today's schools. The report claims that maintaining

excellent standards depends on collaboration within and between schools and that this dialogue needs to be at the heart of how schools improve in the future.

Other recommendations include:

- Giving local authorities a role in supporting and holding to account all schools including academies.
- Providing financial support for schools wishing to become a cooperative school, in the same way the government does for academy conversion.
- Making full and meaningful consultation with parents, staff, pupils and the community a legal requirement before an academy conversion takes place.
- Scrapping 'academy orders', whereby underperforming schools have been forced to convert to an academy regardless of local wishes.

Reviewing post-16 education and training: first areas announced

22 FE colleges and 16 sixth form colleges will be assessed as part of the first round of post-16 education and training area reviews.

As we reported in August's [OCR Policy Briefing](#), the government is undertaking a wide-ranging review of the post-16 education and training sector. The [first areas announced](#) for review are Birmingham/Solihull, Greater Manchester and Sheffield City.

[Guidance](#) to accompany the review has now been published setting out the review process which will

include an assessment of the economic and educational needs of the area and the related implications for post-16 education and training provision, including school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education colleges and independent providers.

The reviews will be led by steering groups consisting of chairs of governors, Local Enterprise Partnerships and local authorities, FE and Sixth Form College Commissioners and Regional Schools Commissioners.

Further area reviews will be announced shortly.

RQF to “change perceptions surrounding vocational education”

Ofqual has published the rules and guidance for the new Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) which will be introduced on 1 October 2015.

These take the shape of a new edition of the [General Conditions of Recognition](#) for Awarding Organisations.

The new rules introduced in this update cover:

- Describing the [size of regulated qualifications](#) as ‘Total Qualification Time’ and ‘Guided Learning’

- Allocating a level (or levels) to a qualification or a component of a qualification
- Assigning credit values to a qualification or component of a qualification
- Recognition of prior learning.

As reported in August’s [OCR Policy Briefing](#), the RQF will replace the QCF as the new framework for all Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

Apprenticeship levy consultation

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has issued a new consultation which outlines ambitious plans to place a levy on all large employers in England to help fund three million new apprenticeships. The size of levy a business will be required to pay will vary according to the number of people it employs and will be paid through PAYE returns to HMRC.

It is proposed that funds raised by the levy will then be accessed by all employers through a digital voucher system, with vouchers being available to all sizes of employer whether they pay the levy or not. The vouchers would then be used by employers to buy apprenticeship training from a bank of licensed providers.

It is envisaged that employers who are committed to apprenticeships will be able to access funding that is

greater than their contribution to the levy. This could be funded through the redistribution of vouchers left unused by less enlightened employers.

Funds from the levy would be used solely for the delivery of training and not be diverted into related activity such as the development of new apprenticeship standards.

Some complex issues emerge from the consultation such as the England-only nature of the levy, how to ensure quality and value for money, encouraging employers to offer apprenticeships to 16-18 year olds, and what to do in the construction industry where a separate training levy already exists. It does not seek views on the size of the levy or on the size of the employers that should be liable to pay the levy.

Prison education to be prioritised

The provision of prison education in England and Wales is to undergo a [review](#) to be led by [Dame Sally Coates](#), Director of Academies South for United Learning.

The Justice Secretary, Michael Gove, announced that the review will investigate methods to improve the quality of prison education with the hope of encouraging prisoners to positively engage with learning. At the same time, the potential for employers to contribute to the prison education curriculum will also be explored so that prisoners are given the opportunity both to learn and to seek employment on release.

Michael Gove has previously highlighted his favour for a system which would link prisoners’ participation in learning and skills training to the length of jail term, and which could potentially lead to a drop in the reoffending rate. Recent research has shown a reduction in re-offending by prisoners who studied courses such as degree-level modules, vocational and academic qualifications including GCSEs and A Levels.

The ‘[Coates Review](#)’ is expected by spring 2016.

New funding steering group announced

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has announced a new steering group, [the Funding Reform and Localism Steering Group](#), which will replace its previous groups - the Funding External Technical Advisory Group (FETAG) and Qualifications Advisory Group (QAG). The new steering group is intended to support SFA’s work on creating a simpler, more locally-focused and responsive

funding system for adult skills.

The new group will be chaired by Dr Ann Limb CBE, Chair of South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) and membership will be made up of representatives from the FE sector, LEPs, and combined authorities.

An “uncomfortable truth”

The Edge Foundation (Edge) claims that statistics from higher education reports disguise the poor job prospects facing many graduates.

In a recent release, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) announced that nearly two-thirds of 2014 graduates were working in a ‘professional’ job six months after graduation, but Edge claims the figure is closer to 40%. In the report, *The graduate labour market: an uncomfortable truth*, Edge gives its own analysis which returns the 40% figure as an average of subjects.

At the centre of this disagreement is the definition of graduate employment. HESA and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) use a definition of ‘professional occupations’ that includes both ‘professional and managerial occupations’ and ‘associate professional and technical occupations’. However, Edge believes that the associate category should not be included as entry to these jobs does not necessarily require a degree.

In their analysis, Edge found a very mixed picture for different subjects. In medicine and dentistry nearly 100% were in a graduate entry role, while this fell to 12% for creative arts and design.

The report makes a series of recommendations, including:

- The need for good, clear information about all paths from school or college
- The use of a single, consistent definition for ‘graduate occupations’
- The need for clear understanding of graduate job prospects to allow young people to make informed choices.

An overskilled workforce? – growth of graduates in non-graduate jobs

In an equally pessimistic report for graduates, the CIPD (the professional body for HR and people development) claims that the majority of UK university leavers are working in jobs that do not require a degree.

The report found that 58% of graduates are in jobs considered ‘non-graduate’ roles, with the trend particularly strong in the construction and manufacturing sectors. The CIPD said the number of graduates had now “significantly outstripped” the creation of high-skilled jobs and says the report’s findings should be a “wake-up call”.

The central question posed in this report is the extent to which the skills that graduates bring to their jobs could have been acquired more efficiently in other ways, for example through an apprenticeship system. HE expansion has been greater in the UK than in most of the rest of Europe and a degree has become a necessity for getting an ever-larger proportion of jobs.

The report suggests that there may be more cost-effective ways (for both government and individuals) of preparing many of our young people for entry into the labour market. It calls on policy-makers to scrutinise the range of courses offered by the HE sector and seriously consider the social and private returns to them.

CIPD speculates that policy makers will conclude that, in many cases, public funds could be more usefully deployed elsewhere in the education and training system. *The findings suggest* that the presence of a large HE sector will not necessarily lead to the attainment of the knowledge economy so desired by government.