

Ofqual dismisses claims that pace of reform is too fast

In a one-off [evidence session](#) to the Education Select Committee, Ofqual has rejected claims that the pace of GQ reforms has been too fast, defending the move towards linear qualifications as providing “significantly more confidence in the awards”.

Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator, and Amanda Spielman, Chair, were questioned by the Select Committee on the work of Ofqual. In a wide-ranging discussion, other key points covered included:

- **Examiners** - Whilst accepting that the shift away from modular exams would increase pressure on the marking system, Ofqual believed that there wasn't a shortage of markers, with exam boards continually recruiting and refreshing their marking workforce. Ms Stacey stressed that more teachers should get involved in marking as part of their professional development.
- **Appeals** – Ofqual believed that there were issues around the appeals system adding that it would soon be making proposals – expected later this month - to improve the process to make it more “swift, effective and fair”.
- **Teacher training** - Ofqual is currently reviewing its decision to ban selected face-to-face teacher training by exam boards with an announcement expected by Christmas.
- **Science practicals** – Ofqual defended its decision earlier this year to stop counting practical work in the final grades for science GCSEs and A Levels, saying that the assessments had become “stultifying”.
- **National Reference Test** – Ofqual accepted that there were risks to the National Reference Test in terms of the potential for students to copy questions for future candidates, and stressed that it was evaluating these risks alongside the associated costs and benefits to ensure the suitability of the tests.
- **Vocational qualifications** - Ofqual had increased its focus on VQs, restructuring its organisation to increase understanding, monitor functional skills and “unpick” the QCF.
- **Regulation** - There was an unprecedented amount of regulation, Ms Stacey accepted, but this was important for the qualifications.
- **Comparability between exam boards** - Neil Carmichael, the Chair of the Select Committee, announced that this would be considered as part of the next Committee inquiry.

Government polices impact on qualifications take-up

Recent changes to education policies are starting to impact on the take-up of qualifications.

Ofqual's annual [qualifications market report](#), which provides information on the number and types of qualifications available for study in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by regulated awarding organisations, outlines a number of factors affecting the development and take-up of qualifications.

For the year 2013/14 these included:

- School performance measures and performance tables
- Removal of the January assessment window
- Funding reforms, school funding and study programmes.

Over the academic year 2013/14:

- Just over 16 million certificates were awarded – around 10% fewer than the previous year.
- The number of available qualifications increased to almost 25,000 – around 6% more than in 2012/13. The increase was mainly due to a rise in qualifications designed to meet the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

Also in this issue:

- > Functional Skills review
- > Post 14 education and work forum
- > Bursaries for Ebacc trainee teachers
- > Party conference round up
- > Ofsted focus on careers guidance
- > College of Teaching
- > GQ subjects not for reform
- > The Last Word
- > Adult FE performance measures
- > The Future for Examining
- > Apprenticeship occupations

- Overall market shares are well established and the number of certificates awarded is concentrated in a small number of qualifications. For example, for GCSE, AS and A Level, 90% of certificates were awarded in just one-third of available qualifications.
- More certificates were awarded in the Preparation for Life and Work sector than any other. This sector accounted for just under one-third of all certificates awarded. Health, Public Services and Care is now the second-largest sector subject area.
- The number of regulated awarding organisations fell to 166 – ten fewer than 2012-13.
- 20 awarding organisations accounted for more than 90% of all certificates awarded during the academic year.

Ofqual believes there may be more useful ways of classifying qualifications for reporting purposes and is looking to make changes to the format of this annual report for next year.

English and maths Functional Skills to be reformed

Skills Minister, Nick Boles, has commissioned a programme to reform English and maths Functional Skills qualifications.

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) will lead the programme to ensure Functional Skills “provide a route for young people, and adults returning to education, to achieve a robust qualification that has credibility with employers” which is “rigorous, challenging and well-taught”.

The ETF’s earlier review *Making maths and English work for all* found that Functional Skills were “not broken”, but that work could be done to improve their relevance and content, as well as to improve their recognition and credibility in the labour market.

This subsequent review will seek a range of views from the post-16 education and training sector to result in a report - scheduled for August 2016 - with policy

recommendations to include:

- What levels of Functional Skills are needed for life and work
- The breadth of skills that the new qualifications should include
- The number of guided learning hours needed to successfully achieve Functional Skills for learners on technical and professional programmes of study, including Apprenticeships.

An important outcome will be a revised set of National Adult Standards for maths and English that has employer and sector buy-in.

The intention is for new qualifications to be available in 2018.

Ofsted promises emphasis on post-16 options in inspections

Ofsted will focus on the quality of careers guidance as part of school inspections in this academic year.

In his [evidence](#) to the Education Select Committee, Ofsted Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw, said that schools must make their pupils aware of all options and that good careers advice should never be seen as a bolt-on.

“Careers guidance is a disaster area in schools” Sir Michael said, and it is “absolutely critical in motivating youngsters”.

“It is important that schools talk about apprenticeships”

continued Sir Michael when asked about the Government’s plans to deliver 3 million new apprenticeship starts, “How many youngsters know what an apprenticeship is, what it looks like or how to apply? Unless schools engage with employers then they are not doing their job properly”.

Since September 2012, schools have been legally responsible for securing access to independent and impartial careers guidance for all their students in Years 9 to 11. However, earlier reports have shown that, whilst there were examples of good practice, careers guidance was not working well enough in schools with information offered being too narrow.

Outcome based measures for adult FE aim to “provoke transformational improvements”

“Achieving the qualification is and will remain important. But it is not the end of the story.... The real value of vocational education lies in whether learners make progress into or within employment or further learning.” This is how Nick Boles, the Minister for Skills, introduces the next stage in the government’s plans to develop outcome based success measures for publicly funded post-19 education and skills (including apprenticeships but excluding higher education).

The success measures (learner destination, progression within learning, earnings) would be used alongside existing measures of achievement and aim to give a more rounded picture of provider performance, to inform learner and employer choice, and ultimately are part of the Government’s management of the post-19 education and skills sector.

A new [consultation](#) outlines detailed proposals for using

and publishing the measures for adult FE. These include:

- Using the measures for accountability and intervention as part of the minimum standards framework
- How local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities can use the new measures as part of local outcome agreements with providers
- How the measures might best be presented and published to help learners, employers, LEPs and providers.

[Experimental data](#) has been published alongside the consultation showing the learning and employment outcomes of learners completing FE between 2010 and 2013.

The intention is to begin using the new measures formally from summer 2017.

Forum for post-14 education and training established

A new research centre for post-14 education and work is seeking members to join its free, national network. The network aims to be the premier forum for debating and lobbying issues related to post-14 education and training.

Launched by the University College London’s Institute of Education (UCL/IOE) in September, the centre is responsible for undertaking national and international research in:

- 14-19 education
- Technical and vocational education and training
- Further education and its interface with higher education
- Initial teacher training and continuing professional development
- Adult skills, community and lifelong learning, with a particular focus on literacy, numeracy, English and mathematics.

The Centre’s research will be supported by maintaining a dialogue between the practitioner, policy and research communities, through collaboration with government agencies, international, national, regional and local organisations, education professional associations, awarding bodies, employers, colleges and independent training providers.

Email post14admin@ioe.ac.uk for further information on the centre’s network.

The Centre for Post-14 Education and Work joins two other recently established vocational education research centres – the Further Education Trust for Leadership (Fetl), and the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER). A fourth research body at the Education and Training foundation (ETF) is in the planning stages.

Next steps for College of Teaching

The [College of Teaching](#), the new independent chartered professional body for the profession, has appointed 13 founding trustees.

The trustees – who comprise five classroom teachers, three headteachers from community, academy and special schools, and five non-teaching professionals – have been chosen to oversee the establishment of the new college and to encourage teachers to get behind it.

Hundreds of individuals applied for the voluntary roles but

only 13 were chosen to make sure the charity is running well and doing what it was set up to do.

The College of Teaching has also launched a new [crowdfunding platform](#). Seeking to raise £250,000, individuals and organisations are being encouraged to give small, yet valuable, donations as part of a recognition scheme that gives them the opportunity to become a Founding Supporter of the College. Pledges will only be taken through crowdfunding if the target is reached.

The Future For Examining: motivating teachers to get involved

A new report from OCR, *The Future for Examining*, explores what motivates teachers to get involved in examining. It offers solutions to ensure the supply of examiners at a time when teacher workload is increasing and more examiners are required at one point of the year.

Recommendations from the report include:

- Working with the College of Teaching to include examining as part of a 'subject expert' pathway
- More differentiated examiner training and activity based on experience
- Promoting progression routes within examining.

In the foreword to *The Future for Examining*, Brian Lightman, General Secretary of ASCL, welcomed the report's "innovative and practical" suggestions for

overcoming some of the pressures in the system. "It points the way ahead to ensuring that everybody can have confidence in the capacity of the system to produce the timely and accurate assessments which are essential to the futures of millions of young people."

The report will contribute to the work of a cross-industry working group which includes the major exam boards, as well as interested parties such as ASCL, HMC and NAHT.

Launched at an event in the Houses of Parliament, the report is based on independent research. Nearly 1000 teachers were surveyed for the report which also incorporates feedback from OCR examiners, head teachers and stakeholder debates.

Top graduates to get up to £30k to train to teach core subjects

Increased tax-free bursaries and scholarships for training to teach Ebacc subjects have been announced.

The government has increased the existing bursaries in order to help attract the best graduates with the "potential to be exceptional teachers" in the core Ebacc subjects (English, maths, science, history or geography, and a language at GCSE).

The bursaries include:

- £30,000 tax free for graduates with a first class degree who are training to teach physics, (an increase from £25,000 in 2015 to 2016). Trainees in physics with a 2:1 will continue to receive a £25,000

bursary, and trainees with a 2:2 will also now receive £25,000, up from £15,000 last year

- Increased bursaries of up to £25,000 in other EBacc subjects
- Continuing the increased funding available to schools boosting starting salaries in maths and physics
- A further 700 tax-free scholarships worth up to £30,000 for physics and £25,000 for maths, chemistry and computing trainees.

The bursaries and scholarships will be available for the academic year 2016 to 2017.

News in Brief

Subjects not being reformed

Ofqual has [published a list](#) of subjects that will not be taught when the reform of GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications is complete.

Further support and information on the reforms is available from the [OCR website](#).

Apprenticeship standards: list of occupations available

A [list of all the apprenticeship standards](#) that are currently being developed by groups of employers (trailblazers) is now available. It identifies their stage of development – including whether they are ready for delivery.

A standard is considered ready for delivery when it has an approved assessment plan and a funding cap assigned.

2015 Political Party Conferences: education and skills round up

Labour Party Conference

The first conference since Labour's defeat in May's General Election and Jeremy Corbyn's overwhelming election victory to become the Party Leader, this was always going to be an interesting few days seeing if and how the new Party jigsaw would fit together.

It was the first outing too for new Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Lucy Powell MP, who having been in post only two weeks, was very much in listening mode. However, in her speech to conference she started laying out her vision saying that education should not be a privilege, but that it was every child's right and that "education was at the heart of Labour's vision for a better society".

Ms Powell went on to say that she opposed the Conservative "academisation" of education, and suggested turning schools into academies did not improve pupil performance. She called for strong local oversight of all schools and stressed there would be no more free schools. She also argued that grammar schools did nothing for social mobility.

The new Minister also said that there needed to be a debate about raising student aspirations and skills. Criticising the Government's education reforms further, she claimed that teachers were leaving the profession en masse and students were suffering.

Shadow Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary, Angela Eagle, claimed that Government cuts to education were in part responsible for the skills shortage now faced by UK businesses. She also claimed that more women were needed in industry and enterprise, as well as in science and research.

During his leader's speech, Jeremy Corbyn called for every school to be accountable to local government, and rejected the revival of selection.

Conservative Party Conference

The Conservative Party gathered this year, making the most of the celebratory feeling of a Party now unfettered by a coalition government and with a full five year term of Government ahead of them.

Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, was one of the busiest politicians on the 'fringe event' circuit. She spoke at the *Are the kids alright? Why the growing pressure on young people matters* fringe event hosted by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), where she argued for the importance of dealing with the stigma of poor mental health in education, and of helping pupils via early intervention.

Ms Morgan argued that building character and the ability of pupils to "bounce back" was a priority.

Further, Ms Morgan said that children who did not make the educational standard at aged 11 needed to go through a process of re-testing, in order to enable children to progress with a command of basic skills.

Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, spoke at the OCR-sponsored fringe event in partnership with *Schools Week* and *FE Week* on whether we have got the right equation for English and maths in our schools and colleges. Mr Gibb spoke about the importance of children gaining a strong grounding in English and maths and the importance of them being allowed to repeat GCSEs post 16.

In a further fringe event, he said that the Government's education policies centred on the *One Nation* vision. He said that the forthcoming Education and Adoption Bill would shift control from Local Authorities "to those who know how to run excellent schools", and incentivise teachers to stay in schools and push transformation.

Mr Gibb said that the Government was interested in the manner of teaching abroad, particularly the style of mathematics teaching in China. He explained that challenging failing schools was a Government priority, and noted that education was a "driving force" in social justice.

The Last Word

Paul Steer, Head of Policy, comments on some of the issues featured in this issue.

In her recent evidence to the Education Select Committee, Glenys Stacey asserted that there is no shortage of examiners and that the exam boards are proving perfectly capable of recruiting and refreshing their marking workforce. Ms Stacey is quite right in her description of the current situation, but this mustn't be allowed to generate any complacency about the future availability of examiners. The demand for examiners is hugely increased as a side effect of reforms to qualifications, and the interest amongst teachers in becoming examiners appears to be static. We are not in immediate peril but now is the time for the education community to come together and consider strategic measures to avert any crisis in the future. An exam system without examiners would be as useful as the proverbial chocolate teapot.

That is why OCR launched its report [The Future for Examining](#) at the House of Commons to a good spread of stakeholders and why we were able to attract speakers such as Mary Bousted, General Secretary of ATL, and Neil Carmichael MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee. It is also why a cross-sector Examiner Capacity and Culture working group has been set up to lead on the issue.

Ms Stacey did stress that more examiners should get involved in marking as part of their professional development, and the OCR report goes further in arguing that clear progression routes, linked to developing a deeper understanding of assessment, should form part of the CPD available to all teachers.

The report reveals that the majority of examiners are motivated by the professional development afforded by taking up the role (and certainly not by the pay). It helps them to enhance their subject knowledge, to prepare students for exams, to use assessment in all aspects of teaching and gives them access to a network of like-minded professionals.

But unsurprisingly, the report cites teacher workload time and again as a major barrier to accessing any kind of CPD. It is almost a cliché that teachers, who dedicate so much of their time to supporting the development of others, have less and less time to spend on their own development.

Against this worrying backdrop, the College of Teaching has announced its next steps towards becoming a 'new independent chartered professional body'. The case for a strong, independent body to support teacher development is well made and long overdue. But does the average 'time poor' teacher have the appetite to engage with such an initiative? This is about to be tested by the College's foray into crowd-funding. It is asking the general population, organisations and especially teachers to pledge anything from a pound upwards with a target of raising £250,000 by February 2016. You can check their progress [here](#). At the time of writing there was a long way to go, but there is plenty of time yet.

The lack of time taken up by non-teaching activities is often given as one of the reasons for a growing teacher shortage and little can be done about a shortage of examiners if there aren't enough teachers in the system in the first place. But it is difficult to get a handle on how big this teacher shortage is. The guardian led with the headline "Half of all England Teachers Threaten to Quit as Morale Crashes," based on the alarming findings of a YouGov poll. The new Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Lucy Powell MP, declared to the Labour Party conference that teachers were leaving the profession "in droves". But the Government has responded with a calmer, more 'steady as she goes' approach. The problem is, we are told, largely limited to the South East and London. And besides, as Nick Gibb said in a recent statement: "Teaching remains a hugely popular profession, with the highest numbers of people joining since 2008."

Certainly it would be unfair to claim that the government isn't doing anything at all about teacher shortages. The recently announced increase to existing bursaries to attract the best graduates with the "potential to be exceptional teachers" in the core Ebacc subjects indicates its priorities and a recognition of the need to increase the supply of quality teachers in subjects like maths and physics.

Whether this will be enough to address the huge demand for the delivery of Functional Skills in the post 16 arena is another matter. The forthcoming second review of Functional Skills by the Education and Training Foundation is tasked with revising these qualifications so that they are, in Nick Gibb's words, "rigorous, challenging and well-taught". The minister would also like to see "a robust qualification that has credibility with employers". A well-taught and highly valued set of alternatives to maths and English GCSE has long been the Nirvana of post-16 education and naming past government initiatives in this area has become something of a parlour game.

The truth is that Functional Skills and its many predecessors were all actually rather well designed and often very well delivered; their strength was that they embraced a philosophy of applying skills in real-life situations which made them relevant to learners who had struggled at GCSE. What these qualifications all lacked was longevity, suffering as they did from endless policy reviews. The brands have always inevitably been weaker than GCSE, but this has been exacerbated by constant changes – there is a long-standing view that it takes at least ten years for a new qualification to become established and recognised. Certainly, Functional Skills can be improved and refined, but, as the previous ETF report declared, "they aren't broken", so a measured approach, building on what is already there would be the best way forward.

If a highly respected post-16 alternative to GCSE is Nirvana, the quest for quality advice and guidance at 16 is looking more like a will-o'-the-wisp. The last government's almost wilful dismantling of the advice and guidance infrastructure, such as it was, didn't help matters, and the legislation introduced to make schools responsible for the provision of quality, independent advice doesn't seem to have hit the target. Certainly, that's what the latest Ofsted report on the matter seems to tell us. But there is no silver bullet to resolve this issue. Certainly, it would help if those providing advice and guidance had a greater appreciation of the choices available to young people, especially in vocational areas. But the idea that 16 year olds would typically know what they want to do in their adult careers is simplistic and we need a system where choices are not irreversible and where there is sufficient breadth to counter the early specialisation that is such an unusual feature of our post-16 curriculum. This looks like a meaty subject for the newly created Centre for Post-14 Education and Work. In the meantime, it would be interesting to know how many young people feel inspired to pursue a career in teaching – we are going to need them.