

Budget continues task of “setting schools free”

Ahead of the White Paper on educational improvements (see page 2), recent budget announcements signalled further steps by the government to devolve power to school leaders. Key points for education from the budget speech included:

- **National School Funding Formula:** The budget aimed to accelerate the move to fairer funding for schools. The current system will be replaced by the first National Funding Formula for schools from 2017-18. Subject to consultation, the government’s aim is for 90% of schools who gain additional funding to receive the full amount they are due by 2020. To enable this, the Government will provide around £500 million of additional core funding to schools over the course of this Spending Review.
- **Academisation:** The government expects all schools to become academies by 2020, or to have an academy order in place to convert by 2022.
- **Northern schools:** The Budget set out investment of £20 million a year in a Northern Powerhouse Schools Strategy. This will seek to tackle educational progress in the North compared with the rest of the country. In support of this, Sir Nick Weller will lead a report into transforming education across the Northern Powerhouse. More funding will see the best academy chains expand and new sponsors developed in the North, whilst the creation of a new Northern centre of the New Schools Network will encourage more free schools in the region. The Government also plans to look at further ways to get and retain the best teachers in the area.
- **Teaching maths up to 18:** The Government has asked Professor Sir Adrian Smith to review the case for how to improve the study of maths from 16 to 18, including looking at the case for more or all students continuing to study maths to 18 in the longer-term. The review will report during 2016.

- **Soft drinks industry levy:** Revenue from a newly announced levy will be used to double primary school PE. It will also provide up to £285 million a year to give 25% of secondary schools increased opportunity to extend their school day to offer a wider range of activities for pupils, including more sport, and £10 million a year to expand breakfast clubs starting from September 2017.
- **Higher Education:** The government will continue to free up student number controls for alternative providers. Doctoral and Master’s loans will be extended.
- **Lifetime learning:** The government will review gaps in support for lifetime learning, including for flexible and part-time study, and bring together information about the wages of graduates of different courses and financial support for further and higher education to ensure people can make informed decisions.

In response to the budget, Neil Carmichael, the Chair of the Education Committee said: “Some academies are delivering great results for their pupils but in progressing to a fully academised system we must ensure all schools are properly held to account for their performance. Multi Academy Trusts currently receive little scrutiny and in our [inquiry](#) we are determined to examine their performance, accountability, and governance. The government will face significant challenges in implementing these proposals”.

In response to the budget announcements, Jeremy Corbyn, Opposition Leader, claimed there was little evidence to show the success of academisation, asked why there had been a drop in the adult skills budget, and queried why there had been no announcements addressing national teacher shortages.

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The White Paper: Nicky Morgan unveils new vision for teacher recognition

A new accreditation system to recognise teachers' ability in the classroom is part of a new vision for schools. In a new [White Paper](#), Education Secretary Nicky Morgan set out proposals to "transform" England's schools.

The White Paper outlines significant changes to teacher qualifications which will recognise teacher expertise and give teaching the same status as doctors and lawyers.

A new, "more challenging" accreditation will replace qualified teacher status (QTS) and will be awarded when a teacher has demonstrated classroom proficiency, including areas such as behaviour management and subject knowledge. The decision whether to accredit a new teacher will be made by headteachers themselves.

Alongside this are plans to ensure the next generation of school leaders are working where they are needed most. To ensure leaders are not discouraged from working in underperforming areas, the White Paper is proposing the introduction of new improvement periods during which schools will not be inspected by Ofsted.

For schools which have been judged as requiring improvement, an improvement period of around 30 months will be applied. Where schools have been taken over by a new sponsor following a period of underperformance, Ofsted will not re-inspect until their third year to give Heads the chance to bring about improvement before being inspected again.

Other reforms outlined in the White Paper include a commitment to support an independent College of Teaching by making available up to £5 million as the college demonstrates its credibility and support within the profession.

A new parent portal will provide information on school performance, guidance on how the school system works and information on specific aspects such as complaints and admissions systems.

The White Paper also confirms the government's plans for all schools to either become academies, or be in the process of converting to academy status, by the end of 2020.

Ofqual to focus on GCSE grading and marking reviews

Ofqual will continue to concentrate on general qualifications reform with how exam boards set GCSE grades 9-1 and changes to exam appeals featuring as key aspects of its work.

As the Education Select Committee approved [Sally Collier](#) as the Government's preferred candidate for the Chief Regulator role, Ofqual released its new [Corporate Plan](#) detailing its priorities for the maintenance of assessment standards over the period 2016-19.

In relation to GCSEs, AS and A Levels, in 2016-17, Ofqual's plans include:

- Ensuring grade standards are maintained in GCSEs, AS and A Levels (see *Stop Press* on page 5)
- Putting in place regulatory requirements for how exam boards will set GCSE grades 9-1

- Monitoring exam board quality of marking
- Completing work on exam boards' marking and appeals systems
- Monitoring and evaluating the delivery of reformed qualifications as they start to be assessed
- Reviewing the rules on exam board support materials and teacher events
- Reviewing exam board provision of special considerations
- Researching the impact of native speaker candidates on standard setting in A Level French, German and Spanish.

The reforms to vocational qualifications – including progression routes and apprenticeships - also feature in Ofqual's priorities, as do the review of functional skills and promoting public confidence in regulated qualifications.

National Reference Tests will be mandatory for selected schools

The Department for Education has confirmed that schools selected for the new National Reference Test (NRT), will have no choice but to participate.

This decision follows a consultation, previously reported in December's [OCR Policy Briefing](#), which sought views on whether legislation should require maintained schools, most academies and free schools to take part in the new NRT.

The NRT is being introduced to provide additional information to Ofqual to support the awarding of GCSEs in English Language and maths with a random sample of year 11 students being asked to take the test each March.

The legislation will come into force on 1 September 2016 and the first full NRT will take place in March 2017.

Resit opportunities for English and maths GCSEs confirmed

Students taking legacy GCSEs this summer in English, English language and mathematics will have 2 re-sit opportunities - one in November 2016 and one in summer 2017.

This is one of the key [outcomes from a recent Ofqual consultation](#) which also announced that exam boards will offer a re-sit in or before summer 2018 for those taking GCSE Science or Additional Science in summer 2017.

The regulator will allow exam boards to choose whether to provide a single re-sit opportunity in *all* other legacy GCSE subjects, including GCSEs in Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

Students taking legacy AS and A Levels will have the opportunity to re-sit these qualifications after the final scheduled award, regardless of the subject. These re-sits will be in May or June of the following year.

There will be restrictions on who can take the GCSE, AS and A Level re-sits. This is to ensure that only those students who need to access a re-sit take them and those that are expected to take a reformed GCSE, AS or A Level qualification do that instead.

The dates for last teaching, last exams and re-sits in legacy GCSEs, AS and A Levels have been [updated](#) to reflect the consultation outcome.

How demanding are the new A Level maths questions?

This is the question that Ofqual will be asking PhD students and maths teachers when it conducts a research study in July this year.

The research aims to compare the level of difficulty of exam boards' sample assessment materials by comparing pairs of exam questions so that the new qualifications are of the right level of demand and to make sure all boards' papers are equally challenging.

Following an initial pilot, the more reliable participants will take part in a further, main study.

The new A Level maths qualifications will be taught for the first time in September 2017.

Any current A Level maths teachers who are interested in taking part in the research should contact Ofqual via public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk for more details.

Scale of school funding issues highlighted

Three quarters of school and college leaders do not receive enough funding to meet the essential needs of the education they provide, according to a [recent survey](#).

This is one of the headlines from research conducted by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) which highlights the effects of financial pressures on education.

65% of respondents have had to cut the number of courses on offer over the past 12 months and a similar number have had to increase class sizes, while 69% have had to cut resources such as IT equipment or books.

Other actions taken include redundancies, non-replacement of teachers who have left, and reducing the number of senior leadership posts.

89% said they are experiencing difficulties in recruiting teachers, with maths, English and science experiencing the most recruitment difficulties. 73% ask teachers to take subjects in which they are not specialists.

The ASCL survey was conducted in January and received 885 responses. The majority of respondents were from secondary schools, both academy and maintained.

Role of local authorities diminishes as school funding moves to a national formula

Under proposals published for [consultation](#), the government has started the process of introducing a national funding formula for schools from 2017 to 2018.

The government believes that the current system for the allocation of funds by local authorities is "outdated, inefficient and unfair" with many variations between geographical areas. These new proposals represent a move towards a system where school funding is allocated on a consistent national formula so that no pupil is disadvantaged by where they live.

The plans will seek to ensure that every school is funded according to need and that funding gets straight to the "frontline" with the role of local authority removed. Local authorities will continue to receive funding to help with high-level special educational needs as they are well placed to make those local decisions.

The government will phase the changes in over time including retaining the local authority role in school funding until 2019-2020 - although the national funding formula will begin in 2017-2018.

Transition from school to work leaves some young people “overlooked and left behind”

The majority of young people are significantly overlooked in their transition to work by the education system and the focus on apprenticeships is not suitable for everyone. These are the findings of the House of Lords Select Committee following its inquiry into social mobility which focused on how to ensure that all young people are offered a high quality career path after they leave school.

In its [inquiry report](#), the committee makes 8 recommendations to the Government, which support the development of an improved system to help young people through the transition from education to work. These include:

- The national curriculum stopping at the age of 14, rather than 16, with vocational routes introduced to young people earlier, and the ages of 14-19 being recognised as a single key transition stage
- A new standard in independent careers advice and guidance, moving responsibility away from schools and colleges
- For the government to act as a facilitator between colleges, schools, local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and employers in order to meet the

needs of local labour markets

- That a cabinet-level minister takes responsibility for the transition from school to work for young people.

Some young people aged 14-24 surveyed by the Committee replied that:

- There were implied hierarchies between options at 16, with A Levels seen as the best and sixth form as the preferred location
- Limited guidance about options was available, aside from A Levels and staying on at the same institution
- Pressure was put on achieving grades with many respondents feeling that options were not available should grades not be achieved.

Chair of the Committee, Baroness Corston, said: “Recent governments have focused on higher education and apprenticeships as the way to help young people to be successful in later life. Both routes can work well – but it is absolutely not the case that they are suitable for everyone. To focus on university or apprenticeships, to the exclusion of other routes, is to the detriment of many talented and able young people”.

Measures outlined for new Institute for Apprenticeships

“To deliver a genuinely world-class apprenticeship programme, we will need a long-term governance arrangement which will support employers to uphold the high quality of apprenticeship standards and be able to respond to the changing needs of business”.

Along with the target of 3 million new apprenticeship starts by 2020, these are the drivers behind the setting up of the new Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA).

Proposals for how the IfA will operate have now been published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Operational from April 2017, draft [measures](#) for the IfA include:

- Powers to undertake quality and approval functions in

relation to apprenticeship standards and assessment plans and for assessing the quality of the end point assessment for each apprenticeship

- Responsibility to advise government of funding allocations per each apprenticeship standard
- Maintaining positive employer engagement in the apprenticeship development process and give it greater credibility by moving functions away from government to those with the necessary skills and experience.

The former BIS Skills Director-General, [Rachel Sandby-Thomas](#), will be the new Shadow Chief Executive of the Institute from April with the Chair and board members appointed by the end of 2016.

Could loans increase the take up of 19+ vocational learning?

A [consultation](#) has been launched into the possible introduction of maintenance loans in Further Education for learners aged 19 and above at levels 4-6.

The loans “on a par with the level of support available in Higher Education” and for people who attend specialist, higher-level providers, could encourage learners towards institutions outside their local area, such as National Colleges and Institutes of Technology and promote the provision of technical and professional education.

Apprenticeships are currently excluded from the proposals.

The deadline for responses to the consultation is 16 June 2016.

Degree apprenticeships to receive further support

The number of degree apprenticeships is set to increase as the government announced the availability of new funds.

£8 million will be focused on supporting universities to design and deliver new degree apprenticeships while a further £2 million will be devoted to encouraging more learners to choose degree apprenticeships.

First launched in September 2015 and featured in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' 5 year plan, degree apprenticeships allow for the study for a degree while working. Designed by employers, universities and professional bodies, degree

apprenticeships aim to offer young people "an alternative to a traditional degree".

Recent [research](#) published by Universities UK, reported that degree apprenticeships are particularly attractive to "non-traditional" higher education students, and provided an opportunity for universities to support widening participation goals. Whilst highlighting challenges for the future growth of degree apprenticeships, the report noted that degree apprenticeships are an "exciting development in vocational higher education" with apprentices likely to be highly employable, having benefited from studying a course tailored to sector needs and several years of workplace experience.

News from Northern Ireland

The debate on GCSE grading in Northern Ireland continues

In the week in which CCEA wrote to schools confirming that all Northern Ireland (NI) schools will continue with legacy GCSEs¹ graded A* to G, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) pledged to bring in reformed GCSEs following the NI Assembly elections in May.

The DUP proposals would change the GCSE grading system in NI to ensure it is compatible with England, arguing that this means that NI students would not be disadvantaged when applying for jobs or university places.

Earlier this year OCR and AQA announced a decision not to offer separate, legacy GCSEs in NI following the devolved Government's move not to adopt the new, reformed GCSE grading system.

¹ In its [letter to schools](#), CCEA announced that NI schools will be permitted to offer Computer Science GCSE graded 9-1 for first teaching in 2016, but only for one year until alternative qualifications become available.

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Grading under the spotlight in transition to new GCSEs

How should the minimum mark for the award of new GCSEs be determined? This is the main focus of a new [consultation](#) on setting grade standards for reformed GCSEs.

Decisions about the awarding of new GCSEs in English and maths (to be first awarded in summer 2017) have [already been announced](#). Ofqual is now consulting on a broadly similar approach for all other subjects, but will also consider changing the previous decision on how grades 8 and 9 are set for English and maths.

The proposals are designed to protect students taking the new qualifications, particularly in the first year when teachers will be less familiar with the new content and how it is assessed.

Ofqual has also published [research](#) into the year-on-year variability of GCSE results in individual schools and

colleges.

Most schools/colleges display little year-on-year variation. However, some display large differences with some commentators believing that this is due to the comparable outcomes approach for grading, or those operating with a high number of students from low socio-economic backgrounds or with speakers of English as an additional language.

However, according to the research, the two main factors associated with variability are schools/colleges which have a larger numbers of candidates straddling the C/D GCSE boundary and schools/colleges with changes in entry size from year to year.

The study echoes Cambridge Assessment's [research](#) (June 2015) which showed that exam results in a school may go up or down in unanticipated ways causing year-on-year volatility.

Ofqual intends to carry out further analysis to better understand the systematic factors associated with year-on-year variability.

The Last Word

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

With the Education White Paper published and the EU referendum heralding a much-needed break on new policy initiatives, it seems like a good time to take stock of some of the policy initiatives and issues facing the education and examination system.

For example, Progress 8 is set to become the headline performance measure this year as anxious schools try to work out how it will affect their place in the league tables. Meanwhile, the government is taking steps to make EBacc subjects compulsory for (nearly) all students by 2020. Some fear this emphasis on an academic core will be at the expense of wider curriculum subjects.

The new GCSEs in maths and English, considered by many to be larger and more demanding than their predecessors, have gone live. These are the first GCSEs graded 9-1. Grade 5 is set to be the new 'good pass', replacing the 'lower' C grade, and there are compulsory resits for those who fail maths and English GCSEs. Professor Adrian Smith is to investigate the viability of making post-16 maths compulsory for all and Functional Skills qualifications are under review.

New reformed vocational qualifications have been introduced with greater levels of external assessment. But Lord Sainsbury is leading plans for new 'technical and professional education' (TPE) routes which could mean further changes – look out for a Skills White Paper in the summer/autumn. A new Institute for Apprenticeships will oversee the quality of apprenticeships, to be funded by the new employer levy. It will have its work cut out to secure a coherent, affordable and assessable range of apprenticeship programmes.

The first wave of 'decoupled' A Levels has been introduced and the future uptake of AS looks set to decline as colleges face cuts, grapple with co-teachability and unscramble messages from Higher Education Institutions about their admissions policies. There is a

surge of interest in the Extended Project Qualification as an alternative to an AS and a predicted decline in the uptake of 'fourth' A Level subjects.

A Select Committee is about to report on the perennial concerns about the quality of information, advice and guidance available to young people.

Ofqual's new Chief Regulator has a challenging year ahead overseeing: changes to appeals processes; monitoring the quality of marking; reviewing rules about exam board-endorsed support materials; implementing the new National Reference Test; and plenty more.

As budgets tighten, FE and sixth form colleges are undergoing Area Reviews to bring about "fewer, larger, more resilient and efficient providers". A national funding formula is planned for schools at a time when an ASCL survey has highlighted a growing shortage of critical funds. Compulsory academisation, for good or for bad, signals further uncertainty and reorganisation.

There has been a scatter of initiatives to improve teacher training, recruitment and retention, but a growing shortage of teachers seems unavoidable. The recent White Paper includes proposals to relocate outstanding teachers to schools in underperforming regions. Meanwhile, the secondary school population is set to increase by 80,000 places and exam reforms will also mean an unprecedented spike in demand for teachers to act as examiners.

At the recent NASUWT conference, Nicky Morgan pledged more support to reduce teacher workload. She paid tribute to the profession and thanked them for their "phenomenal efforts" helping drive up standards that have led to 1.4 million more children in 'good' or 'outstanding' schools compared with 2010. But she also underlined that there would be no pulling back from the vision outlined in the Education White Paper.