

“New era in fairness” for marking reviews

Ofqual has signalled “a level-playing field” for the future of the marking reviews and appeals system aimed at improving public confidence in the exam marking system.

The outcomes of a consultation which intended to improve how exam boards address concerns that students and centres may have about a student’s GCSE, AS or A Level mark, have now been [published](#).

From this summer, exam boards:

- must tell examiners who review results that they should not change marks unless there is a clear marking error
- must monitor their reviewers to make sure that they are acting consistently
- must continue to make AS and A Level scripts available to those schools who want them ahead of the closing date for reviews and will be able to

choose to do the same for GCSE scripts

- will have to categorise the reasons why a result has or has not been changed and, when requested to do so, provide this information to the centre or student.

In summer 2016, Ofqual is planning to pilot a new appeals process in three A Level subjects (maths, geography and religious studies). In these subjects, the grounds for appeal following a review will be extended to enable schools to appeal the mark a student was given if the school believes a marking error was not corrected during the review. Ofqual will evaluate the outcomes from the pilot and decide in 2017 whether to roll this out more widely.

Read this [blog](#) for further information about the changes to the marking reviews system.

A Level choices: should schools be punished?

Schools could be penalised if students fail to complete their A Levels.

This was the message from Skills Minister, Nick Boles, as he gave evidence to the Select Committee Inquiry on careers advice, information and guidance.

“Currently there is no downside to people dropping out after a year and that is not ideal because in truth the value of the programme is to complete the whole two years,” the Minister said. “One of the things that we are going to look at is whether we can change that”.

He said it was concerning if students fail to complete

A Level programmes which may not be appropriate for them.

The Minister’s comments reflect the introduction of [retention rates](#) which will be published in performance tables from this summer – introduced to monitor whether young people are being given suitable education and training opportunities that they see through to completion.

Meanwhile, a recent [Which? survey](#) claims that nearly a third of university applicants wished they had chosen different A Level subjects at 16. Only half of respondents felt suitably informed about how their A Levels could affect their choice of degree or university.

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21st century education for a 21st century economy

Radical action is needed to prepare young people for the next industrial revolution according to a new report.

The Digital Revolution focuses on the impacts of technology on education and employment, claiming that “we [government, schools and universities] are sleep-walking into the biggest potential disaster of modern times” as the nature and number of jobs in the future is set to change dramatically.

The Edge Foundation report, led by its Chair, Lord Kenneth Baker, sets out an 8 point education plan to move the UK’s workforce towards the technical expertise it will need:

1. Primary schools should bring in outside experts to teach coding
2. All primaries should have 3D printers and design

3. Secondary schools should be able to teach Computer Science, Design and Technology or another technical/practical subject in place of a foreign language GCSE
4. The Computer Science GCSE should be taken by at least half of all 16 year olds
5. Young apprenticeships should be reintroduced at 14, blending a core academic curriculum with hands-on learning
6. All students should learn how businesses work, with schools linked to local employers
7. Schools should be encouraged to develop a technical stream from 14-18 for some students, covering enterprise, health, design and hands-on skills.
8. Universities should provide part-time courses for apprentices to get Foundation and Honours degrees.

Latest tranche of Functional Skills review underway

A [survey](#) for practitioners and providers of English and maths Functional Skills has been released by the Education and Training Foundation.

The survey seeks to collate views from individuals and organisations involved in the delivery of Functional Skills qualifications. Feedback is being sought on the role of technology, the structure and size of the qualifications, distinctions between levels, and motivation for learners.

This is the latest step in the Functional Skills reform programme which aims to have revised qualifications ready for teaching in September 2018.

The survey closes on 24 June 2016.

What do employers and learners think about apprenticeships?

Whilst the vast majority of employers remain committed to apprenticeships there is still plenty to do to meet the government’s target of 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020.

The 2015 annual [BIS evaluation](#) of apprenticeship employers reveals:

- Satisfaction levels vary widely by framework with 65% of employers expressing concern at not being able to influence structure, content and delivery
- Maths and English skills are deemed more important to employers offering “newer” frameworks such as Education than more “traditional” frameworks like Construction
- Only 12% of employers have some knowledge of what is involved in the Trailblazer standards
- Only 13% have had an apprentice proceed to a higher level qualification with the employer
- Only 5% of employers engage in traineeships
- Most employers feel that support and guidance is sufficient although this is not the case among small businesses.

The BIS survey does show the positive reasons why employers offer apprenticeships. These include: relevance to the needs of business; the convenience of the training provider handling recruitment; apprenticeships being the required form of training for the industry; and acquiring skilled staff.

The majority of apprenticeships on offer by employers in the survey were Business, Health and Retail with most employers providing only one broad framework.

Two-thirds of employers in the survey provided Level 2 apprenticeships (Construction being the largest sector) and 49% at Level 3 (mostly in Arts, Education and ICT).

Sitting alongside the employer survey, the [learner evaluation](#) strikes a more positive note with nearly all Level 2 and 3 apprentices feeling that they acquired or improved skills not only related to their desired area of work but also to other industries. Career purposes, gaining a qualification and developing work-related skills were the 3 main motivating factors behind taking an apprenticeship.

Government plans for specialist vocational training continue

Further funding for the creation of 5 new National Colleges has been confirmed.

The National Colleges will be established in industries which the government considers are crucial to economic growth:

- National College for High Speed Rail (Birmingham and Doncaster)
- National College for Nuclear (Somerset and Cumbria)

- National College for Onshore Oil and Gas (Blackpool)
- National College for Digital Skills (London: Tottenham Hale and Whitechapel)
- National College for the Creative and Cultural Industries (Purfleet, Essex)

Announced in the Autumn spending review and included in [BIS' 5 year plans](#), the network of National Colleges will aim to provide specialist higher-level vocational training.

Governors to be held to account for prison education

The Ministry of Justice has accepted all the recommendations in a wide-ranging and independent review of education in prisons.

Unlocking Potential sets out Dame Sally Coates' recommendations for a transformation of prison education in England and Wales, as part of the government's wider prison reform programme. The report's proposals tackle the questions of responsibility and accountability for the quality of education in prisons.

The recommendations include:

- giving governors complete control of their education budgets and the freedom to tailor a curriculum to help prisoners secure employment on release and reduce re-offending rates
- creating tailored Personal Learning Plans for each prisoner with governors held to account for the progress of each offender against their plan
- giving governors greater discretion over prisoner access to ICT and digital technology to facilitate learning while keeping important safeguards in place

- introducing a new, stand-alone Ofsted judgement on the standard of education in prisons
- improving the quality of teaching with a new scheme to attract high-calibre graduates to work in prisons for an initial two-year period.

The report recommends that Exam Boards should work together to agree a core basic skills curriculum for all prisons which would include English, maths and ICT. It is hoped that this would lead to consistent standards and support materials to help with prisoner progression. The report also calls for "a flexible 'adult' modular GCSE" in English and maths as part of the curriculum.

Other areas for education include high quality vocational training, employability skills, personal and social development, enterprise and self-employment training.

Implementation of the plans will begin immediately and continue to August 2017 and beyond. It is recognised that the recommendations will need to be aligned with wider reforms to the prison system, Further Education sector, and the introduction of new devolution arrangements, particularly for the adult education budget.

HE White Paper makes it easier for new universities to open

New rules will make it easier for "challenger institutions" to award degrees.

This is one of the main intended outcomes of the new Higher Education White Paper which puts student choice, teaching quality and social mobility at the top of the government's agenda for HE.

Success as a Knowledge Economy outlines the plans for more people to have the opportunity to access a high-quality university education. Policy changes include:

- **Degree Awarding Powers**
A streamlined process will be put in place to encourage a wider range of institutions to award degrees with approval subject to strict on-going monitoring. Student number controls will also continue to be lifted for all providers that can meet the quality standards.
- **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)**
The White Paper confirms plans to deliver the TEF. The Framework will assess and measure different aspects of teaching, including student experience and job prospects of graduates. The TEF will give students more

information about the teaching they will receive before they apply to university and reward universities that are judged to deliver high-quality teaching by allowing them to raise their fees in line with annual inflation from autumn 2017. For the first time this will seek to link the funding of university teaching to quality and not the quantity of students.

- **Fair Access**

The government aims to double the proportion of disadvantaged students entering HE by 2020. Increased reporting requirements relevant to social mobility will be established.

- **UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)**

This single, strategic body will be established to allocate funding for research and innovation.

- **Office for Students (OfS)**

This will be the new HE regulator (in place of HEFCE) - a non-departmental public body with Ministers responsible for appointing its Chair and Board members. The OfS will have a duty to monitor and assure quality and standards across the sector, including all registered HE institutions.

GCSE grading

Following the NI Assembly elections in May, Northern Ireland has its first DUP education minister – Peter Weir. The DUP now oversees every aspect of education from pre-school through to higher education.

As reported in last month's [OCR Policy Briefing](#), the DUP election [manifesto](#) committed to changing the GCSE grading system in Northern Ireland, bringing it in line with reformed GCSEs in England graded 9-1.

According to the manifesto, the DUP “will make the necessary changes to ensure that [the system] is compatible with the rest of the United Kingdom, and Northern Ireland students will not be at a disadvantage when applying for jobs or university places”.

The Last Word

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

Ofqual's changes to the appeals system have been widely reported as a move to clamp down on the number of appeals against exam results. With the introduction of the new Progress 8 measure which will be used in anger for the first time this summer, and which makes every GCSE grade - not just the C/D boundary - count, it looks doubtful that it will have the desired effect.

The expectation that marks will only be changed where there is a 'reasonable' case for keeping the original mark does look like common sense as is the reminder that, for extended answers, it isn't always possible to argue that there is only one 'right' mark. It remains to be seen how different any of this will be to current practice.

Some of the other changes, to be phased in, have attracted more controversy. The option for exam boards to return GCSE scripts in time for schools to review the exam board's marking and to decide whether to ask for a marking review has generated some anxiety in the teaching community. Whereas it seems like a triumph for transparency it also runs counter to various policies aimed at reducing teacher workload. The prospect of having to delay the summer break to spend time reviewing marking that has already been tightly quality assured is not popular with all. The logistics for boards and exams officers will also be challenging which is why OCR won't be rushing to implement this initiative for the coming summer.

A fundamental change to the grounds of appeal, which was proposed in the original consultation, will now be subject to a trial in a limited number of subjects and only at A Level. The trial will remove the current restriction on appeals which can only be on the grounds that the board in question has failed to follow due process. In the trial, appeals can be made against the judgement of the board and its examiners. This suspension of an exam board's right to make a final ruling on the grounds of professional or academic judgement is a huge shift. This change could lead to some far more protracted appeals as it isn't clear who the ultimate arbiter, qualified to make the final decision, would be. It will be interesting work designing the processes and evaluation criteria for the forthcoming trial.

It may prove desirable to be able to appeal against the 'punishments' for schools and colleges threatened by the Skills Minister, Nick Boles, where students 'fail to complete' their A Levels. The whole point of the introduction of AS was to encourage students to take a broader range of subjects and to safeguard them from having to commit to subject choices for a full two years. It proved a particularly successful model for encouraging people to take subjects like maths where they were unsure how well they would cope, and generally contributed to social inclusion by making the commitment to full-time study for those with disrupted lives or difficult economic circumstances. Now that the decoupling of AS from the full A Level may threaten the future existence of AS, it seems that the very possibility that young people might make anything but perfect choices at the outset should be threatened with punitive measures.

And finally, hurrah for the Edge Foundation championing changes in schools to reflect the digital revolution. It's great to see proposals that half of all school pupils should take computer science at GCSE. But it's difficult not to worry about such prioritisation of certain subjects - aren't there others seeking elbow room for more creative subjects, or religious studies or citizenship or character and resilience for that matter. The suggestion that computer science is more important than foreign languages must be intentionally controversial. And to top it all, aren't the new GCSEs in maths and English taking up much more curriculum time than the old ones? Shouldn't the digital revolution reflect teaching practices across the whole curriculum? And isn't it just a little ironic that the computer science GCSE includes a paper and pen written exam?