

Reform to the school system continues

The opening of new selective schools is just one of the proposals outlined in the government's new Green Paper.

[Schools that work for everyone](#) sets out the Education Secretary's plans for changes to the schools system.

Proposals in the Green Paper consultation include:

- Existing selective schools will be able to expand and new selective schools will be allowed to open. They must, however, support local, non-selective schools.
- Faith schools will be allowed to select up to 100% of pupils based on their faith (currently capped at 50%) but must include different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Independent schools will be expected to support state schools, open new state schools or offer funded places to children whose families can't afford to pay the fees.
- Universities will be asked to commit to sponsoring or setting up new schools in exchange for the ability to charge higher fees.

Despite this recent focus on selective schools, the government remains committed to the idea of all schools becoming academies as outlined in its [Educational Excellence Everywhere](#) White Paper earlier this year. Education Secretary, Justine Greening confirmed: "Our hope and expectation is that schools will want to steadily take advantage of the benefits that academies can bring, but our focus will be on those schools where we feel standards need to be raised".

Social mobility remained a key message in the Education Secretary's recent Conservative Party conference speech, where she announced the first six 'Opportunity Areas' across England which will receive additional funding. West Somerset, Norwich, Blackpool, Scarborough, Derby and Oldham have been identified as areas in need of prioritised access to wider support - including building teaching and leadership capacity, strengthening technical pathways, increasing access to university and working with employers - before the programme is widened out to other parts of the country.

An alternative Green Paper

Following the publication of the government's [Schools that work for everyone](#), an alternative Green Paper has been proposed by the Headteachers' Roundtable.

The [alternative Green Paper](#) focuses on "the educational necessities of creating a school system that enables all to thrive" rather than addressing the political imperatives that it claims have been shown in recent government papers.

The Headteachers' Roundtable includes proposals such as:

- Creating one coherently structured school system with no expansion of grammar schools
- Establishing an accountability system for determining school effectiveness that improves on current measures
- Implementing standardised national assessments at

four year intervals and appointing an assessments quality regulator

- Improving teacher recruitment and retention via one centralised entry route, a national recruitment fund, a professional development programme and support for the College of Teaching
- The provision of fairer funding.

The Headteachers' Roundtable proposals do not seek to respond specifically to recent government papers but to demonstrate an alternative route to creating a successful school system.

The [Headteachers' Roundtable](#) is a non-party political group of headteachers operating as a think-tank, exploring and aiming to influence national education policy issues.

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Decisions reached on awarding of top GCSE grades

Ofqual has [confirmed](#) how the top GCSE grades for reformed 9-1 qualifications will be awarded in 2017.

In its original consultation, Ofqual had proposed that the top 20% of grades at 7 or above *in each subject* would be a grade 9. However, this would have meant that some subjects would have had many more grade 9s than current A grades, and some subjects would have had many fewer.

To allow for the natural variations across subjects, a formula will be used that means that about 20% of *all*

grades across subjects at 7 or above will be a grade 9. This will more accurately reflect the differentiation of students' achievements in each subject.

The grade 8 boundary will be equally spaced between grade 7 and 9 boundaries. To carry forward the current standard, the number of grades 7, 8 and 9 for a subject will be based on the proportion of the cohort who would have been expected to be awarded an A or A* had the qualification not been reformed.

Green light for National Reference Test

The first National Reference Test (NRT) will go ahead between 20 February and 3 March 2017.

Ofqual has [confirmed](#) that a sample of around 18,000 students will take the same test in maths and English every year to establish if there is any change in how students perform at a national level over time. Ofqual believes that the test has the potential to provide valuable additional information to inform the awarding of GCSEs.

Confirmation that the tests will take place follows a trial held earlier this year which "went to plan" and demonstrated that the test is ready to "go live".

Results from the NRT will only be used to measure changes in performance nationally - there will be no results for individual students or schools.

The 300 schools that have been selected to take part will be contacted later this month.

Call for a new Baccalaureate

A new Baccalaureate which includes a technical subject and a creative option has been proposed by the Edge Foundation.

[14-19 Education – A New Baccalaureate](#) proposes to broaden the Government's English Baccalaureate (EBacc) which it believes is too narrow and not appropriate for the skills needed in the 21st century.

The new Baccalaureate would include:

- English
- Maths
- Two science GCSEs – one of which could be computer science
- A creative GCSE from a list which would include art and design, music, dance and drama
- A humanities GCSE from a list which would include history, geography, religious education and foreign

languages

- A design and technology GCSE or an approved technical award. Examples include the Cambridge National Certificate in Engineering and the Pearson BTEC First Award in Construction and the Built Environment.

Former Education Secretary Lord Baker, Chair of the Edge Foundation, said that whilst he backed [Lord Sainsbury's](#) "ideas for simplifying technical education for young people aged 16 to 19", he has concerns about "reinforcing an artificial divide at 16 between the academic and technical routes".

In time, Lord Baker would like to see an overarching award, combining GCSEs, A Levels and technical qualifications, which would become the new measure of success at the end of a unified 14-19 phase of education.

Progress 8 update

The DfE has released an updated version of its Progress 8 [guidance](#) for schools for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

A short explanatory [video](#) is also available ahead of the publication of provisional Progress 8 scores later this month.

Progress 8, the new secondary school accountability

system, came into operation from 2016. It aims to capture the progress a pupil makes from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school. It is a value added measure, which means that pupils' results are compared to the actual achievements of other pupils with the same prior attainment in order to give a headline indicator of school performance.

Apprenticeship reform under scrutiny

The Public Accounts Committee has launched an [inquiry](#) into the value derived from apprenticeships.

The inquiry follows a [report](#) from the National Audit Office that claimed that the Department for Education has not set out how it will use the increase in apprenticeship numbers to deliver improvement in productivity.

The inquiry will examine what success in the reform of apprenticeships will look like and how the DfE should maximise the benefits across all apprenticeship programmes, in order to make the best use of public funding.

SFA CEO will lead new Institute for Apprenticeships

The chief executive of the Skills Funding Agency has been appointed as the shadow chief executive of the new Institute for Apprenticeships.

Peter Lauener will take up the post on an interim basis until a permanent chief executive is appointed in 2017. He will fulfil this role on a part-time basis (2 days a week) alongside his responsibilities as chief executive of the Skills Funding Agency and the Education Funding Agency.

The Institute is a new independent body led by employers that will regulate the quality of apprenticeships in England. It will be fully operational by April 2017 and, subject to further legislation, will take on the remit for technical education in April 2018.

Higher Education and Brexit: inquiry launched

An [inquiry](#) has been launched into the impact of exiting the European Union on Higher Education.

The Education Committee will look into the risks and opportunities for UK students both here and in Europe, as well as the likely impacts on EU students studying in England.

The inquiry remit extends to how changes in the freedom of movement rules may affect academics and staff as

well as students, and how UK universities can remain competitive after the withdrawal of the UK from the EU.

The impact of Brexit on university research and funding is not covered by this inquiry as these policy areas are the responsibility of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The Science and Technology Committee is conducting a separate [inquiry](#) into the implications stemming from the UK's exit from the EU on science and research.

Universities to be rated gold, silver or bronze

Further details of how universities will be rated under a new framework have been published.

As outlined in May's [OCR Policy Briefing](#), the Higher Education White Paper confirmed the government's plans to implement a [Teaching Excellence Framework](#) (TEF) in universities in England.

The Framework will assess and measure different aspects of teaching, including student experience and job prospects of graduates. It will give students more information before they apply to university about the teaching they will receive. The Framework will also be used to reward universities that are judged to deliver high-quality teaching by allowing them to raise their fees.

Assessment will be carried out early next year with

ratings of gold, silver and bronze announced in May 2017. These ratings can then be used by students applying for university in autumn 2017 with the intention that it will give a clear picture of where they are likely to receive the best teaching.

Assessment will be carried out by peers comprised of experts in teaching and learning as well as student representatives, employer representatives and widening participation experts.

Amendments have been made to the initial TEF proposals: an appeals process for universities will be made available; and institutions from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be able to participate in the TEF should they wish to do so.

Northern Ireland GCSEs diverge from English model

The [timescales](#) for the availability of reformed GCSEs graded 9 to 1 in Northern Ireland have been announced.

From September 2016 schools will have had access to all GCSE qualifications graded 9 to 1, with the exceptions of English Language and Science. These exceptions have been made by the NI Education Minister as he believes that the assessment of speaking and listening in GCSE English Language, and of practical skills in GCSE Science, should contribute towards the overall grades awarded.

Schools will be able to choose whether to take the reformed qualifications or legacy GCSEs graded A* to G. The legacy GCSEs will be awarded by CCEA.

CCEA is currently revising its legacy GCSEs for first teaching from September 2017 with the following changes:

- the A* grade will be realigned to reflect the level of achievement consistent with the grade 9 on the 9-1 grade scale; and
- a new C* grade will be introduced to align with the level of achievement consistent with the grade 5 on the 9-1 grade scale.

The Last Word

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

The expansion of grammar schools is a topic that provokes strong feelings on both sides of the argument and it is wise for OCR to stand back from the fray. However, it is safe to say in line with many other commentators, that a return to a wholesale selective school system, if it is to happen at all, is still a long way off. There is little appetite for such a change in many parts of the country and many MPs are lukewarm or opposed to the policy, not least Neil Carmichael, the Conservative Chair of the Education Select Committee. Getting legislation through parliament and the House of Lords looks ambitious to say the least and may well have to wait for a future parliament.

In the meantime, the Government consultation, [Schools that Work for Everyone](#), identifies those types of educational establishments it would like to see doing more to support the quality of education across state schools. The establishments it identifies are universities, independent schools, faith schools and grammar schools, all of which it asks to step up to the plate "...to help improve the quality of school places in the mainstream state sector". The response to this call has been mixed, with a member of the HMC warning that independent and state schools "cannot make our relationships work with a gun pointing at our head". The Vice Chancellor of Oxford University has argued that involvement in the government's plans for changing schools would be a "distraction from our core mission". So even these more modest proposals will take some effort to put in place.

Undeniably, there is a logic to asking those institutions with a reputation for excellence to 'do their bit' but it also implies that excellence is a long way from being everywhere suggesting as it does that the place to look for excellence is outside of, or on the fringes of, the state sector. The real opportunity, surely, resides in the many outstanding mainstream state schools whose excellence must not be overlooked, not least when it comes to looking for key players to raise standards in the newly announced 'opportunity areas'.

Whether schools are excellent or otherwise, we have plenty of existing metrics, weak and strong, for identifying how well our school system is doing. The new National Reference Tests, which have just been given a green light for first testing next spring, promise another way of measuring how well the system is performing. The tests, in English and maths, will sample around 18,000 pupils in year 11 across 300 schools. With the tests just out of the trial stage it is difficult to assess how useful they will be. As a general rule, more data is a good thing, providing it is used wisely and its limitations are understood; something we should also bear in mind as we await the publication later this month of the provisional Progress 8 figures.

Given the recent report by the Education Policy Institute (based on PISA data) about [teachers in the UK working longer hours](#) than their international counterparts, schools will want reassuring that the effort involved in the National

Tests, or confirming data about Progress 8, are proportionate to the benefits they bring. Otherwise schools may be tempted to echo the remarks of the NUT: “Teaching has always been a long-hours profession, but hours spent preparing exciting lessons are very different to hours spent providing evidence for bureaucrats”.

It was interesting to see that the Edge Foundation has come up with its own ‘ideal’ baccalaureate. Clearly it is designed to counter the perceived narrowness of the EBacc by offering further breadth in the form of a creative GCSE, and by also adding a Design and Technology GCSE or a technical award. This proposal doesn’t *offer* more breadth than the EBacc – rather it *requires* it. If it weren’t for the fact that a modern foreign language is optional in the Edge Bacc, the E Bacc could nest quite happily inside it. A great number of different subject frameworks have been put forward over the years in the guise of diplomas, baccalaureates and the like each with their individual strengths and weaknesses. Everyone has their own dream baccalaureate. But the real question is about the extent to which any of them should be compulsory and the extent to which learners, with the right advice and guidance, should be free to choose for themselves those subjects they would like to study.