

Post-16 maths to be universal but not compulsory

That's the conclusion from Professor Sir Adrian Smith's long-awaited [review into post-16 maths education](#).

In his 88-page report, Smith concludes that we do not yet have the appropriate range of pathways or the teaching capacity to deliver the required volume and range, but that universal, rather than compulsory maths could become a realistic proposition within a decade.

The report includes analysis and recommendations to increase participation and improve maths education for 16 to 18-year-olds in England.

Recommendations for the government include:

- Work to improve participation in Level 3 maths, including core maths qualifications, developing the capability and capacity of the teaching workforce, including in the FE sector
- Review the 16-19 funding model for schools and colleges, providing financial incentives for maths provision
- Improve outcomes for students yet to achieve a standard pass (grade 4) or above in GCSE maths.

Smith asks the DfE to review its 16-18 GCSE resit policy with a "fresh" consideration of appropriate qualifications for these students

- Ensure new Functional Skills qualifications have a clear purpose and fit appropriately alongside other qualifications in the 16-18 maths landscape – particularly GCSE maths
- Design technical routes that have mathematical and quantitative skills at their core
- Encourage universities to better recognise the value of Level 3 maths qualifications for entry to degree courses
- Improve the role of technology in teaching 16-18 maths
- Commission a study into the negative attitudes to maths, including gender effects.

In its initial response to the report, the DfE confirmed that, although the current policy for GCSE maths (and English) re-takes post 16 will stay in place in 2017/18, the government will continue to monitor and review the policy to assess whether it is having the desired impact. A fuller government response to the Smith review is to follow.

AS entries drop significantly

AS entries have dropped substantially in summer 2017 as more of the available AS qualifications are 'de-coupled' and AS results no longer count towards A Level grades.

This is one of the main findings from Ofqual's [publication of provisional entries](#) for this summer's GCSEs, AS and A Levels. The report's figures reflect changes to qualifications as well as wider policy changes

42% fewer AS entries have been made this year with some of the largest percentage decreases in engineering, performing arts and drama. AS entries are now lower than A Level entries overall.

Other findings include:

- Entries in EBacc subjects at GCSE increased overall by 9%. Entries for all non-EBacc subjects declined.
- GCSE English and English Language (9 to 1 and A* to G) are up 52% due to more year 10s taking English Language a year early and more year 11 students taking GCSE English language now that

international GCSEs in this subject no longer count in school accountability measures.

- English Literature (9 to 1) GCSE entries are up 48%. This is likely to be a result of accountability measures (Progress 8 and Attainment 8) that double count the better of English language/English literature grades, providing both are taken.
- GCSE entries from both years 11 and 12 and above increased overall.
- 53% of students have been entered for the higher tier of GCSE mathematics. Data suggests that this is lower than in previous years.
- A Level entries remained stable. Most notable increases in entry were in science, computing and political studies. Maths remains the most popular subject.

The data was collected by Ofqual in April, so although not complete, does provide a guide to the possible changes in entry patterns that we might see when results are reported in August.

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Queen's speech sets out government priorities for education and skills

"My government will continue to work to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend a good school and that all schools are fairly funded. My ministers will work to ensure people have the skills they need for the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future, including through a major reform of technical education".

So said Her Majesty the Queen, delivering the government's plans for education for the next two years.

Whilst earlier proposals for the expansion of selective education were not mentioned, and whilst no legislative

measures for education were put forward, commitment to a national funding formula and technical education routes are clearly in the DfE's plans.

Further [background notes](#) on the Queen's speech revealed the Government's commitment to:

- Establishing new free schools
- Converting failing maintained schools into academies
- Encouraging the growth of multi-academy trusts
- Delivering Institutes of Technology
- Expanding the apprenticeship programme.

News Skills Minister

In the week following the general election, [Anne Milton](#) MP, was confirmed as the new Skills and Apprenticeships Minister.

The minister will oversee the government's plans to revolutionise post-16 education as set out in last summer's [Skills Plan](#), and the expansion of Apprenticeships. Her responsibilities include:

- Technical education and skills, including T-Levels
- Careers education, information and guidance
- Post-16 funding (including support for young people and adult learners)
- Further education colleges, sixth-form colleges and local patterns of provision (including area reviews and city deals)
- Apprenticeships including the apprenticeship levy, traineeships and Institutes of Technology
- Adult education, including the National Retraining Scheme
- Reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training

- Leading on the review of funding across tertiary education.

A former Conservative Party whip, Anne Milton has extensive experience in the NHS and the Department for Health.

And in a separate appointment, [Robert Halfon](#) MP, the former Skills Minister, has been elected as Chair of the Education Committee.

In his supporting statement, Robert Halfon said: "As a former Education Minister, I bring recent experience of the policy and challenges the Committee will face in the year ahead. But, to those who need reassurance, I am no establishment man. I will not be afraid to challenge ministers, leaders or the sector when needed."

Robert Halfon replaced Neil Carmichael on the Education Committee after Mr Carmichael lost his parliamentary seat in the June General Election.

T-Levels delayed by a year

The implementation of the first T-Levels has been put back a year to September 2020.

The new Skills Minister, Anne Milton, announced that the timetable needed to be adjusted to ensure that technical education reforms were "delivered properly".

2020 will see the first teaching of T-Levels by a number of pilot providers, with all routes available as planned in September 2022.

The DfE will continue to refine and develop plans for technical education reforms over the summer, with a public consultation expected in late Autumn.

Justine Greening announces plans to support FE to deliver T-Levels

The Secretary of State for Education has outlined further steps to help the Further Education sector prepare for the introduction of T-Levels.

“I want to create an army of skilled young people” she said, to deliver “a skills revolution for Brexit Britain. The introduction of T-Levels will be the next stage in this journey”.

Announcements included:

- £50m promised in the Spring budget, will be made available from April 2018 to fund work placements – a component of every T-Level.
- A £15m college improvement fund will help “weaker colleges to up their game” to prepare to deliver the new T-Levels. Pilots for this fund will begin this autumn.
- The role of the FE Commissioner, Richard Atkins, will

be expanded to support FE and Sixth Form Colleges raise standards.

- A programme for National Leaders of FE will be established. These leaders “will be empowered to spread their expert knowledge, as well as mentor and support weaker parts of the system”.
- Plans for a Department for Education summit with businesses in the Autumn to “agree the overall shape of the reforms.”

Delivering these announcements at the British Chambers of Commerce Business and Education conference, the Education Minister called on her audience to create “a genuine partnership between business, government and education professionals” to create “a technical education revolution”, citing T-Levels as the “gold standard for technical and professional excellence”.

Report highlights the challenges of increased work experience in T Levels

A new [report](#) has called for increased investment in post-16 education to cope with the increased demands for work experience in T-Levels.

The call for evidence from the Learning and Work Institute, looked at how the Government’s plan for every 16-18 year old college-based student to be entitled to work experience for 1 to 3 months, might be successfully implemented. Particular focus was given to the challenges of upscaling current practices.

Findings from the report include:

- Further investment will be required for FE providers who already commit considerable resource to the management of work placements
- Current work experience opportunities are nowhere near the scale proposed in the [Skills Plan](#)
- Some industries and employers are harder than

others for FE providers to engage with

- Rural locations face additional challenges
- Employers may experience fatigue as a result of the number of requests they receive from T-Level students and apprentices
- Learner readiness for the workplace is a common challenge for FE providers; employability skills for young people are important
- Good quality information, advice and guidance is essential at an early stage
- National standards and guidance will be required to ensure consistency for both employers and FE providers.

The report concluded that the profile of technical education will need to be raised at a national level, with the engagement of employers key to the Government’s reforms for technical education.

Report warns of dangers of limiting access to the VQ market

Limiting access to the vocational qualifications market to a single Awarding Organisation may create a short-term risk of system failure.

This is one of the findings from a DfE commissioned [report](#) into the vocational qualifications market.

Given the importance of vocational qualifications to the FE sector and the levels of public funding involved, the 121-page report aimed to define the vocational qualifications market, assess its effectiveness in providing good qualifications, and identify potential weaknesses.

In assessing the benefits and risks associated with

options for reforming the market, the report concluded:

- There are likely to be fewer risks if contracts are tendered to allow multiple Awarding Organisations to deliver particular qualifications in order to allow for competition in the market
- The risks associated with reforms in one part of the market are likely to be significantly dependent on decisions made about reforms in other parts of the market
- ‘One size fits all’ is not likely to be appropriate across the vocational qualifications market
- Mitigation actions to manage these risks must be considered alongside exploring potential reforms.

Employers' views targeted in survey on technical education

Familiarity with technical education reforms varies by industrial sector, according to a recent Ofqual [survey](#).

The survey found that awareness of qualification reform varies by sector, with for instance, nearly twice as many respondents from the transport sector reporting awareness of Functional Skills reform than employers from the hospitality sector.

The survey also found that:

- Large employers are significantly more likely to arrange or fund training that leads to a qualification
- Employers who have been involved in the development of qualifications are more likely to report positive perceptions
- Employers in sectors that are regulated are more likely to be familiar with qualifications
- 65% of employers who recruit staff to skilled or

supervisory roles consider it essential for applicants to hold a relevant vocational or technical qualification

- More respondents from the public sector recruit people with or arrange training leading to Functional Skills, compared to the private sector.

The survey of over 2,000 employers, aimed to increase understanding of what employers think about the qualifications they use when making decisions about who to hire, which training to invest in, and what business impact they expect to see from staff who achieve those qualifications.

The survey asked for views on vocational and technical qualifications and assessments. These included Functional Skills in English and maths and the end-point assessments of apprenticeships.

EBacc targets confirmed

The Government has confirmed its ambition for 90% of year 10 pupils to study EBacc GCSEs - English, maths, history or geography, the sciences and a language - by 2025.

The original *Implementing the English Baccalaureate* consultation, which closed 18 months ago, had proposed a deadline of 2020, but a five-year delay had already been signalled in the Conservative Party general election manifesto.

As a stepping stone to the ambition, the government has announced that 75% of year 10 pupils will be studying EBacc GCSEs by 2022.

Other points emerging from the [government's response](#) to the EBacc consultation include:

- The headline EBacc performance measure will change next year. From 2018, the measure will change from the proportion of pupils achieving a GCSE grade 5 and above in the EBacc subjects to an EBacc average point score.
- The DfE has decided that it is "not appropriate" to

expect the same rates of EBacc entry from university technical colleges, studio schools and further education colleges with Key Stage 4 provision, as in mainstream schools.

The students from these providers will therefore not be included in the calculation of the 75% target for 2022, or the 90% ambition for 2025.

- Responses to the consultation raised concerns about the recruitment of teachers required to meet the EBacc ambition, particularly in MFL, but also in science and maths.
- 71% of consultation responses made reference to the difficulties schools will face in maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum.

The government has also published further [analysis on trends](#) in arts subjects in schools where EBacc entry has increased, claiming that the proportion of pupils entering at least one arts subject has slightly increased since the EBacc was introduced.

School leaders reveal levels of understanding of Progress 8

Responses to a recent survey of school leaders showed that overall understanding of Progress 8 was high, but that there were some misconceptions about the detail, such as how science subjects and AS Levels were included.

The [research](#), commissioned by the DfE, looked at school leaders' understanding of the Progress 8 measure – what they felt to be the positives and negatives of the measure, and the changes they had introduced to implement it.

During the research, some schools blamed the

introduction of Progress 8 for causing a narrowing of the curriculum, with some school leaders reducing the range of creative subjects on offer to gain additional points for qualifications that count towards the core Progress 8 subjects.

There was also concern that Progress 8 did not adequately recognise vocational qualifications.

Progress 8 is a secondary school performance measure. It measures pupils' progress across eight subjects from age 11 to 16.

Performance tables to include Level 2 VQs

16-18 performance tables will expand in 2017 to include vocational qualifications at Level 2.

This is one of a few changes for 2017, made as a result of government reforms to the way schools and colleges are accountable for their performance.

Other data that will appear for the first time in [performance tables](#) includes new measures on Level 3

maths, and reformed 9-1 GCSEs in English and maths (other reformed GCSEs will follow in 2018 and 2019).

The headline performance measures in 2017 will use a GCSE grade 5 (strong pass) for reformed English and maths but for transparency in 2017, the headline performance measure will also be published at grade 4.

Chief Inspector confirms curriculum review

Amanda Spielman has given further details of Ofsted's review of the curriculum at a recent [speech at the Festival of Education](#).

Advised by a group of experts, including Cambridge Assessment's Tim Oates, the project is looking at curriculum practice in hundreds of schools across the country from all phases of education from early years through to colleges.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of qualifications and good exam results, Ms Spielman believes that we

have lost sight of the substance of education asking "what is the body of knowledge that we want to give to young people?". "We have a full and coherent national curriculum" she added "and it seems to me a huge waste not to use it properly".

Once the first wave of evidence has been collected, Ofsted will consider whether routine inspection needs "rebalancing in favour of the curriculum", and if so, this could be reflected in the new inspection framework being developed for 2019.

9-1 GCSE grading: how were decisions reached?

Ofqual has outlined in detail the thinking behind the grading of new 9-1 GCSEs.

This includes an analysis of its grading consultation outcomes which covered its approach to setting and maintaining standards for the new GCSEs.

Further information is available [here](#).

Qualifications market: what does the picture look like?

Ofqual has published its [annual report](#) on the qualifications market (2015/2016).

The report provides a picture of the qualifications available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland by recognised exam boards and changes in take up from one year to the next.

Main findings include:

- Just under 15 million certificates were awarded in 2015 to 2016, 7% fewer than in 2014 to 2015. The fall was driven largely by a fall in the number of Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications awarded.
- The number of awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual was 156 - this is 7 fewer than a year earlier.

- The number of available qualifications increased by 3% compared to 2014/15 to just over 36,000, of which about 14,550 had an award made (42% of available qualifications).
- 20 awarding organisations accounted for 90% of all certificates awarded during the academic year
- More certificates were awarded in the science and mathematics subject area than any other in 2015/16 (21% of all certificates awarded).

Ofqual reports that changes in the development and take up of qualifications could have been influenced by a range of factors during this time period including GCSE, AS and A Level reform, school performance measures and funding changes.

Number of research schools doubles

The government has announced funding for 11 new [research schools](#).

They will join a network of existing research schools in areas of the country which the DfE has identified as needing wider educational support.

The schools will each receive £200,000 over three years with the intention that they should become focal points of evidence-based practice in their region and build networks between large numbers of schools.

They will develop a programme of support to get more teachers using research evidence in the classroom to improve teaching practice.

Based at schools in the government's [opportunity areas](#), the new research schools are spread across the country. Locations include Hastings, Stoke-on-Trent, Norwich, Oldham, Doncaster and Somerset.

Ofqual extends grounds for appeal

Schools and colleges in England will have a second chance to challenge GCSE, AS, A Level and Project results if they have concerns about marking errors.

Ofqual has announced that schools and colleges will have a second opportunity to challenge results if they continue to have concerns about marking or moderation errors. This adds to their existing right to appeal results on the grounds that an exam board hasn't followed its own procedures.

Starting this summer, those who continue to have concerns about marking or moderation errors in AS,

A Level or Project qualifications after the exam board has conducted its first review will be able to ask exam boards to look again. This follows the evaluation of a [pilot exercise](#) involving three A Level subjects (geography, religious studies and physics). It found that this additional appeal provided a better opportunity for errors in marking to be identified and corrected.

The opportunity to appeal on the grounds of a marking or moderation error will be extended to GCSEs in English language, English literature and maths in 2018, and to all remaining GCSE subjects in 2019.

Ofqual corporate report

In the April/May edition of [OCR Policy Briefing](#) we reported on Ofqual's corporate plan. The regulator has now released its annual report for the period April 2016 to March 2017, outlining its performance around regulating and reforming general qualifications, regulating vocational qualifications, and developing its people, resources and systems. Further details can be found [here](#).

The Last Word

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

It was good to see the Smith review of post-16 maths has finally been published – it was originally due before Christmas 2016 and has appeared amid a flurry of reports and announcements that came out of the DfE the day before the summer recess – a day that has been dubbed rather disparagingly by some of the press as 'take out the trash day'.

Much of what's in the Smith review had been widely trailed and there were no real surprises, but the 88-page report highlights a series of depressing shortages: a shortage of people studying maths post 16; a shortage of funding for post-16 maths; a shortage of teachers (especially in FE); a shortage of maths options; a shortage of good careers advice; and a shortage of interest in maths from the general population. Most of Smith's 18 recommendations are pragmatic and they also acknowledge the many initiatives that have already been put in place, simply urging that they continue and, sometimes 'expand'. However, the impact of the recommendations will depend largely on how deeply the DfE is prepared to dig into the public purse to fund them.

The Ofqual report on preliminary entries for general qualifications is based on entry data from April 2017 so should be treated with a bit of caution. However, there are a couple of marked trends which are probably safe to comment on. Firstly, the decline in AS entries is a whopping 42%. This would seem to be proof that the decoupling of AS from A

Levels and ongoing funding constraints are leading to more and more institutions dropping the AS altogether. This will feed concerns in the Smith review that options in AS Maths and A Levels in Further Maths are under threat.

The second striking trend in Ofqual's preliminary data is the 9% growth of uptake in GCSE EBacc subjects (except, of course, the beleaguered Modern Foreign Languages). If this growth continues and somebody cracks the MFL issue, the newly confirmed government target of putting 75% of the Key Stage 4 population on an EBacc diet by 2022 looks achievable.

At the same time as confirming this target, the DfE published a report on trends in the uptake of arts-based subjects. Although many have argued that arts-based subjects are losing out to EBacc subjects, the report suggests otherwise. However, the recent survey on attitudes to the Progress 8 performance measure (which includes an EBacc element) shows that some school leaders believe Progress 8 is having a narrowing effect on the curriculum. It is difficult to believe that so many teachers are simply imagining a decline in the arts or other non-EBacc subjects – especially when the Ofqual report on preliminary entries tells us that *every single* non-EBacc GCSE showed a decline in entries this summer.

Speaking at the recent Festival of Education, the Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman argued strongly that an obsession with school performance measures can have a detrimental impact on the curriculum. She said teachers should spend their time on what matters most and that this means “concentrating on the curriculum and the substance of education, not preparing your pupils to jump through a series of accountability hoops”. Ms Spielman is also on the record for speaking out against the current GCSE English and maths re-sit policy. Professor Smith joins her by recommending in his review that the DfE take another look at this policy.

We should welcome aboard, Anne Milton, the new Skills and Apprenticeships Minister. She will certainly have a busy time of it given the extent of her brief. One of her main challenges will be delivering the proposed Technical Education reforms or ‘skills revolution’ as she has termed it in her letter announcing that the delivery of the first T-Level qualifications has been put back a year. But even with this very sensible delay, the scale and timeframes of what is proposed remain enormous. One of the headaches is going to be finding quality work placements for the new army of technical students we are primed to expect. At a recent conference it was suggested 3 million hours of work placements would be needed per annum for the T-Level programmes, though there must be quite a lot of wild speculation behind such a figure. The Learning and Work Institute has outlined many of the challenges of delivering the work experience element, not least the fact that current work experience opportunities are nowhere near the scale proposed in the Skills Plan.

Finally, this month also saw the publication of two reports looking at the vocational qualifications market. One from Ofqual, looks at employer awareness and attitudes – employer awareness varies from sector to sector but the report knocks a hole in the argument that vocational qualifications are neither valued nor understood by employers. The second report on the market from Frontier Economics looks at how competition works between awarding organisations. It points out another challenge to the plans for Technical Education by highlighting the risks concerned with the model in the Skills Plan which franchises out the development and assessment of the T-Level qualifications to single awarding organisations. Whatever the merits or otherwise of such a model, and notwithstanding the overall complexity of the proposals, it is incumbent on all of us involved to get this right. We can't afford another failure like the 14-19 Diplomas – we have to get it right this time for the economy and, most of all, for the young people involved.