



# Pearson

## Policy Eye



### Highlights of week ending Friday 25 August 2017

*(Welcome to Policy Eye, a weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)*

#### The week summed up

It's been week two of the summer exam results season with the attention this time on GCSEs and in particular the changes to the grading system in some subjects.

In other news this week, the Education Policy Institute pitched in with a major report on what's needed, performance wise at least, for England to boast a world class education system, the Office for Fair Access reported on how universities were intending to improve access in 2018/19, the Home Office announced it would finally examine the impact of international students amid concern about previous data, and the government continued its drip feed of position papers on Brexit issues, seven so far this week and counting.

But the big story of course is the GCSE results which given the changes to some subjects and the fact that they weren't adopted across the UK, have come with the obvious caveat that it's virtually impossible to compare one year or system with another. For those who need to get to grips with the detail, Ofqual's accompanying papers on the monitoring of this year's exams and variability at GCSE, let alone the Joint Council's summary data and helpful analysis from other bodies listed below, all offer helpful perspectives.

The headline story is that the overall pass rate has dropped 0.6% to 66.3% with a similar sized drop in top grades, that just over 2,000 16 year olds in England managed to achieve the new top grade of 9 in all of the three new, tougher GCSEs and as Geoff Barton of the ASCL put it: that "pupils and teachers have performed miracles amidst a sea of curriculum change."

But there are some important talking points, currently perhaps four with two others emerging.

First, what impact have the new tougher GCSEs had? Only three subjects are 'new' at present and results in each were slightly down but some of this is probably due to 17 yr old re-sitters and in fairness, 50,000+ top grade 9s were awarded in these subjects; the full impact however may not become clear until all new GCSEs are in place in 2020. Second, the handwringing about whether 17 yr old re-sitters should take GCSEs or functional skills remains; maths in particular remains a problem although there have been improvements this year. Third, gender wars continue; boys continued to do better in maths, girls in English and in scooping up more of the top grades. And fourth, there has been a further drop in entries in some subjects with languages and some creative subjects being obvious examples. The finger continues to be pointed at the EBacc and the accountability system and how far these are narrowing subject choice.

And those two others emerging? Analysis coming but one is the performance of the school system where some new schools have done well and the other is that some students are still not being catered for.

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## Top headlines this week

- 'Students 'disempowered' by not being told their GCSE marks.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Include apprenticeships in school league tables, report urges.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'GCSEs need tougher pass mark to catch international rivals.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'GCSE: Pass rate dips as students face tougher exams.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'The new style GCSEs show why politicians must do more explaining.' ([Friday](#))

## People/organisations in the news this week

### General Policy

- [International students](#). The Office for National Statistics reported on its work on collecting data on foreign students suggesting that there's no evidence that they're overstaying their entitlement and that a more sophisticated approach to collecting data is needed to ensure greater accuracy
- [Have your say](#). The Treasury issued guidance for anyone wanting to submit proposals for this year's Autumn Budget where although the official date has yet to be set, the issues are building up

### HE

- [Views please](#). The Home Secretary called on the Migration Advisory Committee to look at the issue of international students and to consider the impact they have on universities and on society in general and report back by Sept 2018
- [Opening access](#). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) published a summary of what English universities plan to do under their 2018/19 access agreements to help increase access with most emphasizing working with schools and key target groups
- [Data dump](#). David Morris, Deputy Editor at Wonkhe, provided a fascinating picture of the mass of data that's now collected around UK higher education outlining what if anything it tells us about the sector and what perceptions it helps generate
- [Income contingent](#). The New Statesman reported on some of the issues around student loan repayments arguing that one of the biggest is not being able to predict what repayments will be because they're dependent on future income rendering future planning impossible

### FE/Skills

- [Too big to fail?](#) BBC Education Editor Branwen Jeffreys reported on the Learndirect case suggesting that as the title of the piece implies, it was simply too big/important a provider to be allowed to fail
- [On a par](#). The University of Sheffield reported on ways of boosting the esteem of apprenticeships suggesting that including them on school league tables and developing a single application portal could help improve their stature especially in schools
- [#MySkillsStory](#). City and Guilds launched a new scheme to help raise the profile of skills training with people encouraged to share how much gaining a new skill had meant to them and their lives

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## Schools

- [GCSE results](#). The DfE, Joint Council, TES, Schools Week, Education Datalab, the Student Room and professional associations among others have all provided excellent coverage on their respective sites
- [Beady eye](#). Ofqual reported on its monitoring of the 2017 GCSE and GCE summer exams and in particular how it had dealt with major issues and ensured the maintenance of standards
- [Variability in GCSE results](#). Ofqual published data and graphs across the main GCSE subjects over the last couple of years showing in effect little year-on-year variation
- [Top of the Class?](#) The Education Policy Institute (EPI) along with the Institute of Education reported on how far the UK education system needed to go before it could consider itself to be world class suggesting that a significant increase in the number of students achieving the new 'strong' GCSE grade 5 was needed
- [No Excuses](#). The New Schools Network examined the issue of 'No Excuse' schools, schools that take a tough line on performance, suggesting that the 'Gromp' model of comprehensive schools that adopt grammar school standards were among the most successful
- [Next Steps](#). The Centre for Longitudinal Studies at UCL's Institute for Education published two more reports, one on what impact school type and intake has on the subject choices students make at age 14 and one on the impact of taking voc subjects at age 16, as part of its Next Steps series which is monitoring developments for a cohort of young people born in England in 1989/90
- [Inspecting the inspectors](#). The National Audit Office (NAO) invited contributions to its report into Ofsted which will look into the cost and effectiveness of Ofsted inspections and report next spring
- [Latest fly on the wall](#). Educating Greater Manchester is launched next Thursday on Channel 4 as the latest documentary on life inside one of Britain's schools

## Tweets(s) of the week

- "Help yourself to tissues on the way in #GCSE results day" - [@tes](#)
- "I expect the #GCSE number grades will be like Big Ben going silent – a public surprise although inevitable for ages" - [@MrMichaelShaw](#)
- "We live in a secondary-centric world, where moans in GCSE assessment generate more outrage than beams at primary" - [@daisychristo](#)
- "I still think the lack of clarity for schools about whether they're going to be held to account at 4 or 5 is potentially a v. big deal" - [@Ed\\_Dorrell](#)
- "Tell students to read tablets to help heal educational divide" - [@timeshighered](#)

## Other stories of the week

- FOMO. Apparently FOMO or 'Fear of Missing Out' leads some students to make hasty decisions when their exam results are in. The Exams Results Helpline hosted at UCAS which is in full swing at the moment and runs until the end of the month, urges parents and young people to take a little time to sort out their possible options and not to be bounced into something they might subsequently regret. A link to the helpline is [here](#)



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- Millennial maelstrom. According to an article in Business Insider this week, millennials are gradually reshaping the way we live through their lifestyle choices. Millennials are variously described as those born between 1992 and 2002, give or take a few years, and they have distinct tastes largely shaped by having grown up during the recession. The article lists nearly 20 products and services which millennials have turned their backs on and which are in danger of decline. They include: beer (millennials prefer wine and spirits;) bank branches (all online;) department stores (prefer specialist brands;) and cereals (millennials prefer healthier on the go options.) A link to the article is [here](#).

## Quote(s) of the week

- “The way we abandon those who never get to do A’ levels is the biggest problem in Britain’s education system” – Times columnist Phillip Collins on the academic – vocational divide
- “I’m proud to say I started my career in nursing doing an apprenticeship” – the Skills Minister highlights the importance of keeping options open for young people after their GCSE results
- “There’s no reason for anyone to say it’s confusing” – the chair of the Independent Schools Council attempts to reassure doubters about the grade changes ahead of GCSE results day
- “When you’re trying to raise standards to the degree to which we are doing, it is inevitably controversial” – the School Standards Minister acknowledges the controversy behind exam reforms
- “Putting an end to the research excellence framework would save the sector “£250m” – a professor of organizational behaviour examines which HE ‘behaviours’ would help the sector save money
- “I can’t read anymore much as I used to. My concentration has been shot by this bloody screen” – award winning author Howard Jacobson on his struggles with twitter

## Number(s) of the week

- £65,000. The amount of national debt per UK household according to recent government figures
- 66.3%. The proportion of UK entries gaining a ‘good’ A\*-C or 9-4 GCSE pass this year, down 0.6%
- 96,000. How many more students need to achieve the top two grades in GCSE maths if we are to match top OECD performing nations according to a new report from the Education Policy Institute and IoE
- 24.8%. How much of their tuition fee income (above the basic level) universities will spend on supporting access and participation according to the newly signed-off access agreements by OFFA
- 4,600. How many international students overstayed their authorization and not 93,000 as had originally been suggested in official figures according to the ONS
- 8.4%. The NEET (not in education, employment or training) rate for 16 – 18 yr olds in the last quarter, up 0.3% according to latest DfE figures
- 35. The age at which people start to feel increasingly unhappy at work, according to research from HR firm Robert Half UK

## What to look out for next week

- 3<sup>rd</sup> round of Brexit negotiations begin (Monday)