



Pearson

Policy Watch

Your guide to what's happening in the world of education



The week in a nutshell

Exams, of all shapes and sizes, have dominated the week, and once again we've witnessed unprecedented actions. First there was the decision by John Swinney, the Scottish Education Secretary, to withdraw all downgraded awards. This was followed by Gavin Williamson's "triple lock" for A level students, introducing mock results into the appeals equation. In England A level grades remained stable, but as in Scotland the week before, the focus has been on the impact on disadvantaged pupils. Further details on appeals are due next week from Ofqual and so expect continued coverage. Students also received vocational results, including BTEC, with positive press coverage highlighting the value of this type of education. Outside of exams, respondents to Pearson's Global Learner Survey feel COVID-19 will fundamentally change education and that technology will play a continually increasing role. Although no one knows that the "new normal" will be post-pandemic, perhaps this week will go some way in shaping it, especially when it comes to exams.

Top stories

This year's A-level grades in England have remained broadly stable with a 2.5% rise in A to A* grades, with a 0.7% rise in overall passes (A*-E).

- 98.3% received grades A*-E, up from 97.6% in 2019. Increase in As and A*s awarded at A level, up from 25.5% in 2019 to 27.9%.
- 358,000 UK students have been accepted into University so far this year, an increase of 3% on last year.
- *Stakeholder reactions:* [Labour](#); [Children's commissioner](#); [NEU](#); [ISC](#); [AoC](#); [UUK](#); [UCU](#)

Ahead of results the Government announced a new "triple lock" for students ahead of A Level and GCSE results which will provide "added security" to those set to receive their grades.

- Students could accept their calculated grade, appeal to receive a valid mock result, or sit autumn exams to ensure the achievements of young people are recognised.
- [Ofqual](#) will publish further details on appeals next week (w/c 17 August)

John Swinney, Education Secretary in Scotland, announced the withdrawal of all downgraded awards and the issuing of teacher assessed grades.

- Mr Swinney also set up an independent review into what happened, from the cancellation of exams through to moderated awards.
- *Stakeholder responses:* [SQA](#); [Children's Commissioner Scotland](#)

Pearson news

Pearson Global Learner Survey Our Global Learner Survey, now in its second year, captures the voice of learners from across the globe. Over a thousand respondents from the UK, along with similar numbers from six other countries, shared their views on learning, skills and the impact of COVID-19. **The seven key trends** are: There is no returning to a pre-COVID-19 education world; Trust and confidence in education systems is on the rise nearly everywhere; Learners expect schools to catch up with the times on issues of equity; If online is here to stay, learners want a better experience; Pressure is on to develop skills to sustain people through the pandemic and beyond; Universities have more opportunity than ever to help drive economic recovery; School feels safer at home. [Click here](#)



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Pearson tweet of the week



Other news

Parliament

- Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan's letter to universities asking for admissions flexibility this year

Regulators & funding bodies

- Ofqual: Arrangements assessment & awarding of Vocational and Technical Qualifications 2020 to 2021
- Ofqual letter to universities and colleges regarding summer 2020 results
- Ofqual: Awarding GCSE, AS & A levels in summer 2020: interim report

Further Education

- BBC coverage of BTEC results day

Higher Education

- Unison calls for sustainable university funding

Scotland

- COVID-19 testing for education workers

Wales

- Minister for Education guarantees that a learner's final A Level grade cannot be lower than their AS grade

Northern Ireland

- CCEA Chief Executive Comments on the release of Northern Ireland's GCE Grades

Reports

- Education Policy Institute: Addressing the digital divide in education
- RSA: The impact of exam changes on students explained

Consultation watch

Consultations closing

- Ofqual: Consultation on the assessment and awarding of Vocational, Technical and other General Qualifications in 2020 to 2021. [Closes 14 August: 11.45pm](#)

New consultations

- QAA: Degree apprenticeship handbook in Wales. [Closes 14 September](#)

What's happening in Parliament next week

- *House of Commons in recess until 1 September*
- *House of Lords in recess until 2 September*