



Pearson

Policy Watch

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



The week in a nutshell

The spectre of 2021 exams is never far away and once again they hit the headlines as **Scottish Education Secretary John Swinney** announced the **cancellation of Highers and Advanced Highers** exams. They will be replaced by teacher assessment. A decision had been expected in February, but pressure had been building for an earlier announcement. **Secondary schools in Wales have gone online** for the final week before the holidays in an attempt to suppress the COVID cases. And in parts of South East **England secondary pupils will be tested** as case numbers rise. We had the publication of the latest Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (**TIMSS**) report, which showed England performing, on average, significantly above most other countries. Performance in maths has improved at year 5 but decreased significantly in science at year 9. And finally, the almost **400 courses eligible for funding as part of the government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee have been announced**. Available from 2021, these courses form part of ministers' plans for reskilling and upskilling. We await further detail around flexible loans and credit stacking, other key components of the plan.

We also have two new policy blogs this week – [Cindy Rampersaud covers the future of skills & vocational education](#) and [Gary Gates talks about UK Learns](#).

Top story

The Government has **announced** that **tens of thousands of adults will now be able to benefit from nearly 400 free courses next year for those without a full qualification at level 3**.

- The courses will be available from April 2021 aimed at developing in-demand skills and to open up further and future job opportunities. The £95m offer forms part of the £2.5bn National Skill Fund. **The Prime Minister** commented he is “determined to help everyone who has lost their job to retrain, develop new skills and find new opportunities.”
- Lifetime Skill Guarantee will also include a Lifelong Loan Entitlement which will allow participants to spread out their study over their lifetimes and to take high-quality courses in both further education colleges and universities.
- A full list of the courses that will be delivered was published in a **Written Ministerial Statement**. They range from engineering courses to agriculture and teaching courses.

The **Scottish Government** has **announced** that **next year's Higher and Advanced Higher exams will be cancelled**.

- The move will mean that next year's exam results will be based on the judgment of teachers rather than any formal assessment. The news comes after the country's National 5 exams were cancelled recently. The announcement on Higher and Advanced Highers was not expected until February next year.
- **In a Statement made by Education Secretary, John Swinney** he claimed that the cancellation is “safe” and “fair”. He continued to note that the decision “better recognises the reality of the disruption so many pupils have already had to their learning in the course of the last few months.”

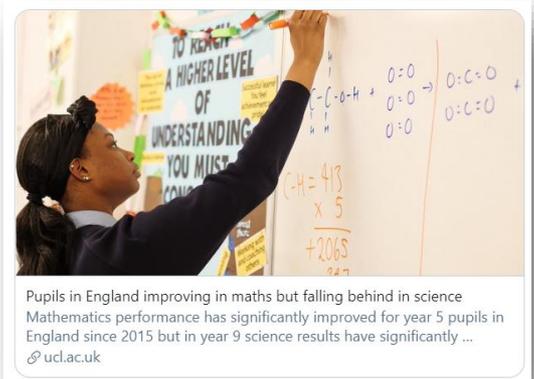
Secondary schools and colleges in Wales will move to online learning from Monday as part of “a national effort to reduce coronavirus transmission.”

- The Welsh Education Minister **made it clear** that schools and colleges are safe and secure environments with “almost half of Welsh schools having had zero cases since September” however it is the wider social mixing outside the school and college spaces which poses a threat to public health.
- Kirsty Williams did note that primary and special schools will continue to operate as normal as its more difficult to “undertake self-directed learning.”

Pearson news & blogs

TIMSS Pearson was proud to be a partner in the delivery of TIMSS 2019 – the important, international assessment in mathematics and science, that informs policies and supports the teaching of these vital subjects. [Read the report here](#)

Blogs This week we have two new policy blogs. **Cindy Rampersaud** discusses the future of skills & vocational education and Gary Gates looks at how UK Learns has supported skills development during 2020. [Blogs home](#)



Pearson tweet of the week



Other news

Parliamentary

- [Gavin Williamson - Further Update on the Lifetime Skills Guarantee \(Statement\)](#)
- [Higher Education Covid-19 update \(Statement\)](#)
- [Education Committee - Exams 2021 – Dame Glenys Stacey and Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP](#)
- [Cabinet Office - Appointment of Susan Acland-Hood as Permanent Secretary at Department for Education](#)
- [Dame Rachel de Souza named as preferred candidate for next Children's Commissioner](#)
- [Education Committee - Pre-appointment hearing with Government's preferred candidate for Children's Commissioner](#)
- [APPG on Oracy published interim report from its Speak for change inquiry](#)
- [Westminster Hall debate - Covid-19: Impact on Schools and Exams](#)
- [Westminster Hall debate - Disabled Children: Accessible and Inclusive Education](#)
- [Westminster Hall debate - Covid-19: Music Education](#)
- [Education Committee - Letter from the Minister of State for School Standards regarding Catch-up Funding](#)
- [Welsh Affairs Committee - Youth employment and the Kickstart scheme in Wales](#)

Regulators & inspectorates

- [Ofqual - Letter from Dame Glenys Stacey to Gavin Williamson](#)
- [Ofqual - launches consultation on exam advance information](#)
- [Ofqual – Publishes code used to calculate qualification grades in summer 2020](#)

Schools

- [Institute of Education \(IOE\) - Pupils in England improving in maths but falling behind in science](#)

Further Education & Skills

- [AoC - Governing colleges in a virtual world](#)
- [AoC - The impact of competition in post-16 education & training](#)
- [DfE - Behavioural insights and engagement with technical education](#)
- [UNESCO - The promising progress of the Global Skills Academy, a mission to support skills development and employability of one million people](#)

Higher Education

- [OfS - English higher education 'in reasonable financial shape' despite impact of pandemic](#)

Scotland

- [Scottish Parliament - Statement on Covid-19 \(Education\), John Swinney](#)

Policy Watch

Week ending Friday 11 December 2020

- Scottish Parliament debate Education
- EIS - Welcomes Exams Statement Clarity, says Teacher Workload must be Properly Managed

Wales

- Secondary schools and colleges in Wales move to online learning ahead of winter break
- New 'Curriculum for Wales' must be delivered consistently across Wales – Senedd committee
- Welsh Government meets 100,000 apprenticeships target

Reports and blogs

- The Education Policy Institute - Early years workforce qualifications and children's outcomes
- GK – Education and skills insight report

Consultation watch

New consultations

- Ofqual – Support materials and advance information in 2021 GCSE, AS and A level exams – [closes 20 December](#)
- DfE - Standards for boarding schools and residential special schools – [closes 23 February](#)
- Isle of Man - Racial and Cultural Awareness in Education on the Isle of Man – [closes 4 January](#)

What's happening in Parliament next week

House of Commons

- **Tuesday 15 December:** Education Committee Appointment of the Children's Commissioner for England
- **Tuesday 15 December:** Effect of the covid-19 outbreak on people with learning disabilities - Christian Matheson MP