



# Pearson

## Policy Watch

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



### The week in a nutshell

Rising coronavirus cases drove headlines in the education this week. Calls for England to follow Wales in moving classes online before the Christmas holidays led to the Department for Education threatening legal action against Greenwich Borough Council. This after the council wrote to head teachers asking to move teaching online. To counter the rising rates of coronavirus in schools the Government has announced that from January, **every secondary school and college in England will have access to rapid coronavirus tests** following a pilot. We also had the publication of **data from Ofqual which showed that the number of grades changed following an appeal for GCSEs awarded in the summer rose by 900% this year**. We also saw the **Northern Ireland Education Minister** again make clear that exams will go ahead and in **Wales** further detail on how general qualifications will be assessed. And, finally, the Office for Students published new analysis showing an **increase in the proportion of BAME students entering higher tariff universities between 2013-14 and 2018-19**.

This week's blogs are by **Rod Bristow**, discussing our new 'Future of Qualifications and Assessment' project, and **Gary Gates** on the future of Higher Technical Education. For **more blogs click here**.

### Top story

**From January, every secondary school and college in England, including special schools, will have access to rapid coronavirus tests, following the success of recent pilot schemes, the Government has announced.**

- Staff in secondary schools will be eligible for weekly tests, and students will be eligible for daily testing for seven days if they come into contact with someone who has tested positive.
- From January, those in the same bubble do **not** need to self-isolate if they agree to daily testing.
- Primary schools will be supported to roll out testing as quickly as possible over the spring term.

**The number of grades changed following an appeal for GCSEs awarded in the summer 2020 rose by 900%.**

- The total number of appeals for GCSE rose from 2,182 last year to 27,825 this year; marking a 1175% increase. Analysis from Ofqual also showed a 620% increase in changed A Level grades from 197 to 1,420 at the end of the 2019/20 academic year.

**The OfS has published an analysis of rates in HE between students from different ethnic groups. The report found that there was an increase in the proportion of BAME students entering higher tariff universities between 2013-14 and 2018-19. This is consistent with data from the DfE.**

- There was a higher proportion of Asian, white and mixed ethnicity students at higher tariff universities compared with other providers, but only 5.3 per cent of entrants to these universities were black.
- Regardless of their ethnicity, students at higher tariff universities were most likely to continue with their courses. In 2017-18 the continuation rate for white students at higher tariff providers was 96.1%. Black students at non-higher tariff universities had the lowest continuation rates of any ethnic group in the same time period at 83%.

## Pearson news & blogs

**Future of Qualifications and Assessment project** Pearson is embarking a new project to better understand how our education system and model of assessment are working for young learners during the 14-19 phase. Our project intends to take a longer view than simply responding to this summer's events or looking ahead to next year's exam series. We will go back to first principles, considering the function and purpose of Key Stages 4 and 5. The first phase of the project begins with a major consultation with the education sector, employers, parents and, most importantly, with young people to gather their views on a range of questions around each of these issues. [Read more here](#)

**Blogs** This week [Rod Bristow](#) discusses our 'Future of Qualifications and Assessment' project. And [Gary Gates'](#) blog on the future of Higher Technical Education was featured on the [HEPI website](#). [Blogs home](#)

## Pearson tweet of the week



## Other news

### Parliamentary

- Liaison Committee - Youth unemployment committee recommended to the House
- Education Committee - Letter from the Chair to the Secretary of State for Education regarding exams in 2021, 15 December 2020
- Gavin Williamson Written Statement on COVID testing in schools
- Labour Party - Wes Streeting comments on Government announcing mass testing in schools from January
- Education Committee - Second Report: Appointment of the Children's Commissioner for England
- Department for Education - Dame Rachel de Souza confirmed as new Children's Commissioner

### Regulators & inspectorates

- Ofqual - New interim chair of Ofqual

### Policy Watch

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- Ofqual - Review on barriers to online and on-screen assessment published
- Ofqual - Letter from Dame Glenys Stacey to AoC, Sixth Form Colleges Association, HOLEX, AELP, the Exams Office and ASCL
- Ofqual - Government Statistics - Appeals for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2020
- Ofqual - Government Statistics - Malpractice in GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2020 exam series
- Ofsted - COVID-19 isolation having a detrimental impact on children's education and welfare, particularly the most vulnerable

## **COVID-19**

- Department for Education- Secondary schools and colleges to get weekly coronavirus testing
- Department for Education - Staggered rollout of coronavirus testing for secondary schools and colleges
- Department for Education - Thousands of schools to benefit from COVID early years support
- UNESCO and Education International call on governments to consider teachers and school personnel as a priority group in COVID-19 vaccination efforts
- UNISON - UNISON backs councils' attempt to close schools amid COVID spike
- GMB - School support staff must get Covid-19 vaccine alongside teachers
- The Education Policy Institute - School attendance and lost schooling across England since full reopening
- AOC - January reopening and testing guidance
- NEU - comment on Plans for Schools in January

## **Schools**

- Department for Education - Students receive autumn exam AS and A level results

## **Further Education & Skills**

- Labour Party - Stop neglecting vocational and technical qualifications Labour warns the government
- AOC - Roll out of weekly testing for colleges
- NHS Employers - Apprenticeship incentive payments extended
- Mayor of London - Mayor unveils £25m skills boost to help Londoners support recovery

## **Higher Education**

- UCAS analysis shows potential for step change in equality by 2030

## **Scotland**

- Scottish Government - Rise in teacher numbers
- EIS - Vulnerable teachers believe keeping schools open "at all costs" is risking their health
- EIS - Primary and Secondary Teachers Share Concerns over School and Safety

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- NASUWT - Teacher workload must be addressed in Highers plan

## Wales

- Welsh Government - Welsh Government announce plans for serial testing in schools and colleges from January
- Welsh Government - Written Statement: Update on General Qualifications in 2021 (16 December 2020)
- Education Minister Kirsty Williams provides further clarity on system to replace exams for general qualifications in 2021
- The National Assembly for Wales - Children, Young People and Education Committee Report: 'Mind over matter: two years on'

## Northern Ireland

- Northern Ireland Executive - Independent Review of Education
- Northern Ireland Assembly - Summer 2021 Examinations: Contingency Arrangements
- Alliance education spokesperson questions Education Minister over refusal to cancel or significantly change exam assessments

## Reports and blogs

- UCL IOE - 46% of all schools in England have no BAME teachers

## Consultation watch

### New consultations

- Ofqual - New Consultation: Support materials and advance information in 2021 GCSE, AS and A level exams

### Closing consultations

- Ofqual – Support materials and advance information in 2021 GCSE, AS and A level exams – [closes 20 December](#)

## What's happening in Parliament next week

- The House of Commons and House of Lords are in recess until 7 January 2021

**This is the final Pearson Policy Watch of the year. Thank you for reading Policy Watch and we wish you a good festive break. We will return on Friday 8 January.**