



Pearson

Policy Watch

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



The week in a nutshell

It's been an explosive week as summer 2021 exams dominated education news. **Welsh Education Minister Kirsty Williams** announced no end of year GCSE, AS level or A level exams. This was supported by unions. The **Education Select Committee** agreed with DfE ministers that exams should take place in England but that contingencies and adaptations need to be considered. That was also the message from **HMCI Amanda Spielman** and in a report by the thinktank **EPI**. A lot can happen before next summer 2021 and so it will be interesting to see if the positions in England and Northern Ireland change and if so, to what extent. **Ofsted** published a series of reports highlighting the impact of the pandemic across education, including the regression in learning since the first lockdown. And the week has been bookended by proposals from **UCAS** and **UUK** on university admissions. Both call for a switch to a post qualification system but differ on how it would work. With a Higher Education White Paper expected before the end of the year, expect the PQA debate to intensify.

In the latest of our **Policy Blog Series**, Sharon Hague discusses [why the UK cannot fail at online learning](#).

Top stories

The Welsh Education Minister Kirsty Williams has announced that there will be no end of year exams for those who would typically be taking GCSEs, AS levels or A levels in Wales in 2021.

- Williams confirmed that instead of exams, the Welsh Government intends to work with schools and colleges to use teacher-managed assessments which will be linked to an “agreed national approach” in order to provide consistency across Wales.
- The situation surrounding Vocational Qualifications however is “more complex” and will require “extra work”.
- **Stakeholder responses:** [UCAC](#); [NASUWT](#); [NEU](#)

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector and chair of Ofqual's “recovery committee” stated that holding exams only in core subjects was the kind of option that is under consideration for Summer 2021.

- Spielman has said that “it was very clear that those coming through for exams this year have actually had a tougher time than last year's year 11s and 13s. She had not seen any evidence that pulling exams is a sensible default route to go down again and warned of the “unintended consequences” of doing so.
- **Think Tank EPI** published a report on its position for summer 2021 exams. Suggestions include greater optionality in exam papers & benchmarking assessments to provide “contingency grades. [NEU](#) welcomed the proposals.

The Chair of the Education Select Committee has written to the Secretary of State about the role of Ofqual and exams in 2021

- **The letter** is critical of the way that the exams series was handled during the summer and questions Ofqual's independence and its position in relation to the Department for Education.
- On next year's exam series, the Committee is "strongly of the opinion that exams must go ahead" but urges "careful consideration" in case some schools or areas suffer greater impact from the coronavirus.
- The letter also calls for the release of promised papers and minutes relating to events during the summer.
- **Stakeholder response: NEU**

Ofsted reports showed children have regressed in basic skills and learning during the pandemic.

- Reports published by Ofsted show the effects of the pandemic across the education sector from early years provision, children's social care and post-16 education.
- Alongside the five reports published on Tuesday, **Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman** published a commentary which suggests that "children and learners have slipped back in their learning to various degrees since the first national lockdown in March."

UCAS & UUK set out respective positions on Post Qualification Admissions (PQA)

- **UCAS:** students would receive offers from their chosen universities on the same day as receiving their exam results. The new proposals mean that the university term would need to begin in January to allow sufficient time for applications to be submitted, assessed and offers to be made and accepted.
- **UUK:** also suggests switching to a PQA model from 2023, as part of a move to bring greater transparency and trust in the admissions system. They do not support a move to January starts and call for an end to unconditional offers. **Fair Admissions Review Recommendations**

Pearson news & blogs

- **Pearson & EPI webinar** The virtual panel discussion was chaired by Bethan Staton (Financial Times) and included Sharon Hague (SVP Schools, Pearson), Professor Becky Francis (Education Endowment Foundation); Sir Jon Coles (United Learning); Priya Lakhani (CENTURY Tech); David Laws (EPI); and Christian Wakeford MP (Education Select Committee)..
- In the **latest in our series of blogs, Sharon Hague** discusses why the UK can't afford to fail online learning. To read more **Pearson Policy Blogs click here.**



Pearson tweet of the week



Other news

Parliamentary

- Education Select Committee: Accountability hearing with Amanda Spielman, HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted
- Education Select Committee letter to Gavin Williamson on Ofqual and summer 2021 exams
- Michelle Donelan, Minister of State for Universities: Written statement on students returning home
- Winter support scheme announced for children and families
- Green Party calls for 2021 exams to be replaced by classroom assessments

Regulators & inspectorates

- Ofsted to introduce new early years inspection arrangements
- HMCI commentary: findings from visits in October
- Ofsted: Children hardest hit by COVID-19 pandemic are regressing in basic skills and learning
- Ofsted: COVID-19 series of briefings (incl. schools, SEND provision, FE & skills)

Further Education & Skills

- DfE: Experimental statistics on young people's transitions from education to work in England
- AOC: Reallocate apprentice funds to colleges to offer students a 'plan B'

Higher Education

- UUK: Fair Admissions Review Recommendations
- UCAS on Post Qualification Admissions
- UKRI rule out blanket funding extensions for PhD students
- Christmas guidance set out for university students
- OfS: Tackling differential outcomes for underrepresented students in higher education

Scotland

- Scottish Government: Helping university students home at the end of term
- EIS consults members for views on COVID action in school

Wales

- Kirsty Williams' statement on summer 2021 exams in Wales
- Apprentice recruitment incentives announced – up to £3,000 per apprentice

Northern Ireland

- CCEA: Summer 2021 Adaptions for the five GCSE Subjects Outstanding

Research, reports & blogs

- EPI: Education Policy Institute position on testing and examinations in 2021
- SMF: (Adult) education, education, education – explores the role that adult education does and could play in improving the labour market outcomes of low-income households
- LGA response to SMF adult education report – calls for COBRA style response to unemployment 'crisis'
- GK strategy: Education & Skills insight report
- British Council survey shows adults didn't modern foreign language study at school

Consultation watch

New consultations

- Post-16 Level 2 and below study and qualifications in England. [Closes: 31st January 2021](#)

Ongoing consultations

- DfE: Regulating independent educational institutions. [Closes: 27th November](#)

What's happening in Parliament next week

House of Commons

- **Monday 16 November:** MPs to debate petitions relating to university tuition fees
- **Wednesday 18 November:** Future of the Union Learning Fund debate, Lilian Greenwood MP
- **Thursday 19 November:** The future of work - Kirsten Oswald MP

House of Lords

- **Monday 16 November:** Impact on the spread of COVID-19 of students returning to their universities, Lord Storey