



# Pearson

## Policy Watch

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



### The week in a nutshell

Education remains at the forefront to the national news, be it calls for teacher vaccinations or the storm around food parcels to those on free school meals. In addition to these issues, this week has seen **Gavin Williamson** set out to Ofqual more details around his call for teacher assessed grades. In the same letter, he also cancelled vocational exams (including BTEC) due to be taken in February and March. This drew criticism from **Labour** who had called for this earlier and said VQ students were an “afterthought”. In another change of policy, **Ofsted** reversed its decision to inspect schools in person. **DfE** has also extended the deadline for responses to the latest phase of its **review of Level 3 qualifications** (now 31 January). This review could have far reaching consequences for the future of further education, as will the much anticipated **White Paper** which is due for publication any day now.

This week's **blog is by Ria Bhatti** and considers the unintended consequences on the nursing profession of proposed changes to vocational qualifications at Level 3. For **more blogs click here**.

### Top stories

**The Education Secretary has written a letter to Simon Lebus, Chief Regulator at Ofqual outlining the DfE's intention to “explore the possibility of providing externally set tasks or papers, in order that teachers can draw on this resource to support their assessments of students”.**

- Williamson again confirmed his pledge not to use any algorithms to determine grade outcomes, instead it will be for teachers to decide “deserved grades”.
- The Department for Education **will consult alongside Ofqual** on the alternative for exams.
- **Simon Lebus'** response confirmed collaboration to ensure the fairest possible alternative arrangements.

### Cancellation of vocational exams, including BTEC, in February and March

- In the Secretary of State's above letter, Gavin Williamson announced the cancellation of vocational exams (except Functional Skills and ESOL) in February and March, saying they are no longer “viable”.
- **Shadow Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships, Toby Perkins stated** that “Gavin Williamson must urgently set out how these qualifications will be awarded and stop treating BTEC and vocational students as an afterthought.”

### Ofsted to return to remote inspections

- Ofsted has **confirmed** that they have decided all planned inspections will be carried out remotely until after the February half term despite plans to return to in person inspections of early years and colleges next week. It noted that because of the remote nature of the upcoming inspections they “will be unable to cover the full scope of a monitoring inspection.” Further detail of the inspections process will be published shortly.

**DfE extends consultation on the second stage of the review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below.**

- It now closes on 31 January. The **Level 2 and below consultation** has been extended to 14 February.

## Pearson news & blogs

**BTEC February and March assessments** Following the announcement by the Secretary of State that BTEC exams will now not take place in February and March, we have released the following statements for:

- Educators
- Students

**Teaching Awards 2021** The deadline for entries has been extended to **March 12**. Visit [teachingawards.com](https://teachingawards.com) for details.

**Events** Check out the recording of the online launch event for Making Waves research.

**Blogs** Ria Bhatti talks about the unintended consequences on the nursing profession of proposed changes to vocational qualifications at Level 3. [Blogs home](#)

## Pearson tweet of the week



## Other news

### COVID-19

- Gavin Williamson letter to Simon Lebus (Ofqual) on exam arrangements (13 January)
- Simon Lebus' (Ofqual) response to Secretary of State's letter (13 January)
- Labour – Government should stop treating BTEC and vocational students as an afterthought
- ASCL – comment on Education Secretary's exams letter
- NEU - comment on Gavin Williamson on Exams
- AOC – response to DfE and Ofqual letters on exam arrangements
- Unions pen joint letter to ministers calling for priority COVID vaccinations for teaching staff

### Policy Watch

Week ending Friday 8 January 2021

## Parliamentary

- Oral Education questions to Ministers – for 18 January
- Education Committee – Impact of COVID on education & children’s services: Gavin Williamson & Susan Acland-Hood
- Westminster Hall Debate – School closures: support for pupils
- Decisions of Petitions Committee – agree to schedule debates on teacher assessment, BTEC predicated grades, and reducing university fees

## Regulators & inspectorates

- Ofsted - inspections to be done remotely until half term

## Schools

- Ofsted guidance on what's working in remote education
- Children’s Mental Health Week 1-7 February 2021 – details and resources
- Sutton Trust – Remote learning: The digital divide (Report)
- *International*: UNESCO Enabling teachers to provide quality education to marginalised adolescent girls

## FE & skills

- £135m capital fund to support T Levels

## Higher Education

- Russell Group - letter to students in final year of schooling

## Scotland

- Scottish Government - Remote learning for schools
- John Swinney - COVID-19 education update

## Northern Ireland

- CCEA - message on vocational qualifications (11 Jan)

## Research & blogs

- RSA blog - Catch-up, recovery and the future of schooling

## Consultation watch

### Extended consultations

- DfE - Review of Post-16 Qualifications at level 3: Second stage – closes 31 January
- DfE - Level 2 and below consultation – closes 14 February

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Week ending Friday 8 January 2021

## Closing consultations

- OfS – Consultation on regulating quality and standards in higher education – closes 19 January

## What's happening in Parliament next week

### House of Commons

- Monday 18 January: Education Questions
- Monday 18 January: Debate - Effect of the covid-19 outbreak on schools - Derek Thomas MP
- Tuesday 19 January: Education Committee evidence session - The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services