



Pearson

Policy Watch

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



The week in a nutshell

Rishi Sunak's Spring Budget dominated events in the House of Commons this week. The Budget included widely trailed announcements on skills and apprenticeships. The **Chancellor** announced that employers who hire a new apprentice will receive £3,000 per new hire, double what they currently receive under the existing scheme. There will also be an additional £126 million in England for high quality work placements and training for 16–24-year-olds in the 2021/22 academic year. [Read Cindy Rampersaud's response to the Budget here.](#)

Elsewhere, a new report by the **Education Policy Institute**, funded by the **Nuffield Foundation** has found that poorer students in sixth forms and colleges trail their more affluent peers by as many as three A Level grades when taking the qualifications. The report calls for additional government funding to fill the attainment gap.

Finally, **admissions officers** have warned that the Government's announcement last week of teacher assessed A-Level grades could cause UK university admissions to become unstable for a second year in a row. The Future of Qualifications and Assessment consultation continues and so there is still time for you to join the 1000s of people who have already shared their views [Click here to take part in the consultation](#)

Top stories

In his second Budget as Chancellor, Rishi Sunak announced additional support for apprenticeships

- Employers that hire a new **apprentice** between 1 April and 30 September 2021 will receive £3,000 per new hire. The existing scheme offered businesses £1,500 per new apprenticeship (or £2,000 for those aged 24 and under). Today's announcement made no stipulations about age. All apprenticeships hired will result in the employer receiving £3,000, irrespective of age.
- Also speculated was a new "flexi-apprenticeship" scheme. Although the Treasury has not called it this, the Government will introduce a £7m fund from July 2021 to assist employers in England to set up and expand "**portable apprenticeships**".
- The funding announced to support **research and development** was more focused on incentives for innovative business rather than targeted support to assist the higher education sector. The Chancellor published a consultation alongside Budget documents with the aim of carrying out a "review of R&D tax reliefs".
- The Chancellor committed more money to expand the **traineeship** programme. He stated that the Government would provide an additional £126m in England for "high quality work placements and training for 16-24 year olds in the 2021/22 academic year". Employers that provide trainees with work experience will continue to be funded at a rate of £1,000 per trainee.

A new [report](#) by the Education Policy Institute has found that poorer students in sixth forms and colleges trail their more affluent peers by as many as three A level grades when taking qualifications.

- The research finds that the disadvantage gap is substantial during the **16-19 education phase** with poorer students continuing to see worse education outcomes than their more affluent peers.
- Very little research has been undertaken at 16-19 level and EPI suggests that **additional government funding is necessary to close the attainment gap** at this level. Targeted funding is recommended to address learning loss during the pandemic which has exacerbated the already large gap among students at this stage of their development.

Admissions officers [have warned](#) that the Government's announcement last week of teacher assessed A-Level grades could cause UK university admissions to become unstable for a second year in a row.

- It is believed that although teacher assessments are fairer than an algorithm that was originally deployed last year, it is very likely that **grade inflation will arise as predicted grades that were provided for UCAS applications will not be the same as those that are awarded by teachers**, this summer.
- It is expected that universities which are concerned about financial losses (off the back of Brexit or losing out on international enrolment) will try and "scoop up" as many home students as possible, mostly from less selective institutions than themselves.
- One English university admissions officer stated that "this would cause calamity down the bottom of the chain...In short we are expecting it to be like last year."

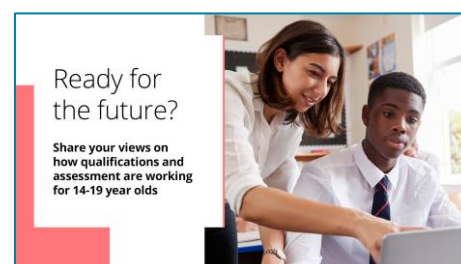
Pearson news

Future of Qualifications and Assessment We are undertaking a public consultation on the future of qualifications and assessment. And so, if you are a student, parent, educator or employer, we would love to hear from you. Join the 1000s who have already done so. [Click here to take part in the consultation](#)

Budget 2021 response Cindy Rampersaud's response to the Budget focused on how reskilling and upskilling talent will go some way to ensuring we are able to recover in an effective and sustainable way. [Find out more](#)

Race and Ethnicity editorial guidelines published The guidelines will serve as a resource to help content developers — including authors, reviewers and editors — create meaningful representations of minorities and challenge racial stereotypes and associated prejudices in all Pearson courseware, digital materials, services, qualifications and assessments. [Find out more](#)

As well as including all previous editions of Policy Watch, our [Policy Hub](#) includes our latest [policy blogs](#) and recordings of [events](#).



Pearson tweets of the week



Other news

Parliamentary

- Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP - Contingencies Fund Advance
- Petitions Committee – to debate GCSE, A level, and BTEC grading for summer 2021
- House of Commons Library - Part-time undergraduate students in England
- Education Committee - The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services (2 March 2021)
- Education Committee - Letter from the outgoing Children's Commissioner on a further submission to the Covid-19 inquiry, dated 26 February 2021
- Education Committee - Letter from the Secretary of State for Education regarding alternative arrangements to exams in 2021, dated 25 February 2021
- Education Committee - Follow-up evidence from Graham Archer, Director for Qualifications, Curriculum and Extra-Curricular and Tony Foot, Director of Strategic Finance following their appearance before the Committee on 23 February 2021, dated 1 March 2021
- Education Committee - Letter from the Secretary of State for Education - Update on the Department for Education's response to COVID-19, dated 25 February 2021
- Work and Pensions Committee - Children in poverty: Measurement and targets (3 March 2021)
- Draft Statutory Instrument Approved - Children and Young Persons (teacher misconduct & adoption)
- Scottish Affairs Committee - Universities and Scotland (25 February 2021)
- EDM 943 - Tabled 30 September 2020 - Funding for school counselling services
- House of Lords Statement - Education Return and Awarding Qualifications in 2021

COVID-19

- Department of Health and Social Care - All households with children of school age to get two rapid COVID-19 tests per person per week
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) - COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey Round 2, England: Dec 2020

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Week ending Friday 5 March 2021

Regulators and inspectorates

- Ofqual - Draft guidance for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator - OIA publishes further case summaries of complaints arising from the impact of Covid-19

Schools

- Department for Education - Education Secretary speech to FED National Education Summit
- Children's Commissioner - Dame Rachel de Souza's first message as she begins her term as Children's Commissioner for England
- EPI - Response to Budget 2021 announcements on education and skills
- NEU - Comment on Budget statement
- Early Years Alliance - expresses frustration at lack of new measures for early years in 2021 spring budget
- Early Years Alliance - BUDGET 2021: Nurseries and childminders in England face £247m funding cut for spring term, new analysis reveals

Further Education and skills

- Department for Education - Government Statistics - Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics 2019 to 2020
- Learning and Work Institute - Blueprint for recovery and renewal in young people's education and employment opportunities
- AOC - EPI's disadvantage gap study reveals poorer 16-19 year olds behind their peers
- AOC - Chancellor Rishi Sunak delivers Spring Budget to Parliament
- Centre for Progressive Public Policy - The Budget should have tackled the deep structural problems with apprenticeships
- GK Strategy - National Apprenticeship Week – An opportunity missed?
- Federation of Small Businesses - Apprenticeship announcement welcomed by FSB

Higher Education

- QAA - Update on arrangements for the Award of the Access to HE Diploma
- Universities Alliance - CEO Vanessa Wilson speaks at Westminster Higher Education Forum
- Universities Alliance - University Alliance responds to the budget
- Russell Group - Russell Group response to the 2021 Budget

Scotland

- Scottish Government - Phase 2 of school return
- Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) - Full pupil return to schools risks reversal in COVID progress
- Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) - EIS writes to party leaders in support of vaccinating school staff

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Wales

- Welsh Government - £50 million extra for school improvements
- Welsh Government - More pupils to have opportunity to return to schools before Easter

Northern Ireland

- Humanists UK - 'Perverse', 'archaic', and unfair: law allowing religious discrimination against teachers blasted by Stormont Education Committee
- NAHT - Government responds to the consultation on arrangements to rectify age discrimination in public sector pension schemes in NI

Consultation Watch

New consultations

- **Ofqual - Closing: 11/03/2021**
New Consultation: Regulatory arrangements for the awarding of vocational and technical and other general qualifications in 2020-2021
- **Ofqual - Closing: 11/03/2021**
New Consultation: Consultation on the general qualifications alternative awarding framework

What's happening in Parliament next week

House of Commons

Monday 8th March

- Debate - Continuation of the Budget debate

Tuesday 9th March

- Education Committee (10.00am, Virtual Meeting)
The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services
Witnesses: Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education; Ian Bauckham, Acting Chair, and Simon Lebus, Acting Chief Regulator, Ofqual
- Oral questions (11.30 am) - Treasury (including topical questions)
- Debate - Conclusion of the budget debate

Wednesday 10th March

- Financial Statement – The Spring Budget 2021 - Rishi Sunak

House of Lords

Monday 8th March

- Oral questions - The Lord Bishop of Worcester (Bishops) to ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the quality of provision for teenagers in the care system.
- Baroness Donaghy (Lab) to ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the report by the TUC Working mums: Paying the price, published on 14 January.

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