



Pearson

Policy Watch

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



The week in a nutshell

It has been a busy couple of weeks since the last Policy Watch with several significant (and long awaited) announcements being made. Ministers finally responded to **Sir Philip Augar's review of higher education finance**, with changes proposed to repayment thresholds and terms. Many worry that this could prevent those from disadvantaged backgrounds entering HE. The details of the **Lifelong Loan Entitlement** were more warmly received as the policy has the potential to support reskilling. The Government also announced it would not be pursuing a **post-qualifications admission** system at the current time. And this week, the **OfS** set out its plans for tackling poor quality provision. After waiting for so long, if nothing else the sector has some clarity.

The much-anticipated next stage of the **review of level 2 and below** qualifications has been launched. The consultation sets out new groupings of qualifications and which will attract funding. And **Ofqual** set out its conditions for the alternative qualifications at level 3 (i.e. BTEC, AGQs etc).

In the world of schools, there has been a significant change to the **National Tutoring Fund** with the dropping of the pupil premium. And **Robin Walker** has set out his approach to curriculum ahead of the upcoming Schools White Paper, signalling a departure from his predecessor. While the **Public Accounts Committee** has set out its concerns around school funding, following its recent inquiry.

Top stories

The Public Accounts Committee **publishes report** into the financial sustainability of schools in England

- MPs warn that the DfE's reliance on national figures that indicate schools are in reasonable financial health is masking "significant variation and challenges for individual schools".
- The Committee has significant concerns on more-deprived schools "faring worse than less-deprived schools under the Department's new funding system" - while some academy trusts are building up large reserves, meaning a significant amount of funding is not being spent on educating pupils currently in school.
- Some of the steps that schools have taken to maintain their finances have adversely affected children's education: cutting staff, dropping subjects from the curriculum and further reducing the support system for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) which "continues to fail many children and remains financially unsustainable".
- The Department for Education also "has little assurance" that extra £4.7 billion committed for school funding in the 2021 Spending Review "will be enough to cover cost pressures including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic".

APPG Youth Employment to launch paper on **The Impact of Vocational Qualifications on Young People's Employability and Labour Market Outcomes, following inquiry**

- To sign up to attend the online launch event, [click here](#) (15th March – 9am-10am)

Ofqual publishes annual qualifications market report for the academic year 2020/21

- The report provides an overview of the qualifications market in England and this year found:
- 11,700 active qualifications (available qualifications with certificates) in the academic year 2020 to 2021, a 0.2% increase on the previous year.
- In total 10.8 million certificates were issued for GCSE, AS, A level and vocational and other qualifications available for award in England over the 2020/2021 academic year, up 4.1% compared to 2019/2020.
- There were 6.1 million GCSE, AS and A level certificates awarded in the 2020 to 2021 academic year, up by 0.6% compared to the previous year.
- There were 4.6 million certificates awarded for vocational and other qualifications in the 2020/2021 academic year, up by 9.1% compared to 2019/2020.
- The awarding organisations with the largest market shares in the academic year 2020 to 2021 were AQA (35.0%), Pearson (21.9%), OCR (7.0%) and City & Guilds (5.1%); the rest of the 142 awarding organisations with active qualifications (excluding the ones offering EPAs only) accounted for 30.9% of the market.

National Tutoring Programme (NTP) no longer requiring 65% of tuition support to be provided to pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding.

- The PA news agency reports that the NTP said it still recommended, to training providers, the focus of tutoring support should be on pupils *“who have been most affected by the disruption caused by the pandemic”*, but *“we recognise that this will include a significant number of pupils outside of the pupil premium cohort and we encourage you to offer your support to this wider audience”*.
- Lee Elliot Major, professor of social mobility at the University of Exeter, has said that the move looked like a *“desperate attempt to try to boost numbers of pupils being tutored by abandoning the very principles that were behind the tutoring programme in the first place”*.

Department for Education launches consultation on proposals to reform post-16 qualifications at level 1, level 2 and entry level.

- At level 2 the Government is proposing that eight distinct groups of qualifications will be in scope for public funding, alongside GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs).
- Qualifications will be grouped according to whether they support progression to level 3 study, provide access to sustainable employment at level 2 or deliver English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).
- The eight groups comprise six groups that will be available to both young people and adults, plus two groups for adults only (although they ask whether they should also make one of these groups available to 16-19 year olds).
- Five groups of level 1 qualifications and four groups at entry level will be considered for public funding in the future. All groups should be available to both young people and adults. This includes English and maths qualifications and ESOL qualifications.
- DfE expect this process will take place in a phased way from 2024-2027. Consultation closes 27th April.

Ofqual has launched a consultation on its proposed approach to regulating qualifications to sit alongside A levels and T levels at level 3

- This follows the publication of DfE’s plans to reform post-16 qualifications in July 2021. For alternative technical qualifications, IFATE will be responsible for approvals and will consult on its criteria and requirements for approval later this year.

- Consultation closes 20th April.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has [published the latest data](#) on young people aged 16 to 24 not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England, covering the 2021 calendar year.

- The NEET rate decreased for the overall 16-24 age group at the end of 2021 to 10.5%.
- The fall is driven by a decrease in the NEET rate for those of post-compulsory education age 18-24 to 12.6%. The proportion of 18-24 year olds not in education or training is 49.8%.
- The NEET rate for the younger 16-17 group has remained fairly stable in the latest year 3.0%, with just 4.3% not in education or training (NET).
- In 2021, nearly a quarter of all 16-24 NEETs were inactive due to being 'long term or temporarily sick'. This has increased from 2012 when this was one in ten.

Office for Students (OfS) [confirmed new conditions](#) that allow the regulator to tackle poor quality provision.

- The new requirements will allow the OfS to intervene more robustly where courses fall below expectations, or where the rates of top degrees awarded continue to rise without good reason. This follows a consultation process which ran last year.
- The conditions, which apply to courses at all levels offered by universities and other higher education providers registered with the OfS, come into force on 1 May 2022

The Scottish Government has [published a National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#)

- This contains over 70 actions across five key priority programmes that have been identified as having the greatest potential to deliver economic growth that significantly outperforms the last decade within the current constitutional arrangements.
- Investment will be prioritised in entrepreneurialism, skills and retraining and the development of new markets and opportunities.

Department for Education [publishes response to Augar Review and HE reform package](#)

- Announcements on student finance include: student loan interest rate to be set at inflation (RPI+0%) for new borrowers (2023/24); the tuition fee cap will be frozen at £9,250 up to 2024/25; the repayment threshold for new borrowers starting courses from September 2023 will be set at £25,000 until 2026/27; the student loan repayment term will also be extended to 40 years for new borrowers from September 2023.
- The Government has [launched the long-awaited consultation](#) on delivering the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE). Closes 6 May.
- The Government is also [consulting on a full package of HE reform](#) covering: Student Number Controls for "low-quality" subjects; Minimum Eligibility Requirements for accessing student finance, dependent on having at least two E grades at A Level (or equiv), or at least a level 4 (grade C equiv) pass in England and maths and GCSE.
- The Government also [published their response](#) to the consultation on post-qualification admissions (PQA) and have said that they will not be pursuing the policy.

Pearson news



My Twist on a Tale The winners of the My Twist on a Tale: Our Tomorrow writing competition have been chosen. The winning stories and poems ranged from earthlings zipping around on hoverboards and cyborg dogs to a space version of Romeo and Juliet and the need for new laws to keep people safe. To read all 17 winning entries [click here](#)

Pearson tweets of the week



Other news

Parliamentary

- Commons: Skills and Post-16 Education Bill – remaining stages
- WMS: Education Update
- WMS: Political Impartiality in Schools
- WMS: Expansion of DWP Train and Progress
- Commons: Higher Education Reform
- WMS: Higher Education Reform
- Westminster Hall: Regional Inequalities: Child Poverty
- WMS: Level 2 and Below Qualifications Update
- Lords: Higher Education: T-Levels
- Lords: National Tutoring Programme
- Lords: Higher Education Reform
- Lords: Music Education in Schools
- Public Accounts Committee: Reducing staffing, narrowing curricula and reducing SEND support to maintain schools' finances risks "damage to children's education"
- Public Accounts Committee: "Chaotic" £1.9BN Kickstart scheme for youth employment fails to deliver for young people or taxpayer

Policy Watch

Week ending Friday 4 March 2022

Regulatory and funding bodies

- Ofqual: Ofqual seeks views on regulatory approach for level 3 qualifications
- Ofqual: Annual qualifications market report: academic year 2020 to 2021
- Ofqual: Principles underpinning a group of vocational and technical qualifications
- Ofsted: Early career framework and national professional qualification inspection framework and handbook
- ESFA: Level 2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) user and level 2 functional skills qualifications in ICT with removed funding approval from 1 August 2022
- ESFA Update: 2 March 2022
- ESFA: Section 251: 2022 to 2023
- ESFA: Apprenticeships and traineeships: February 2022
- Office for Students: New OfS conditions to raise quality bar and tackle grade inflation
- IfATE: Third cycle for Higher Technical Qualifications announced
- QAA explores student engagement and performance during the shift to digital teaching, learning and assessment
- QAA supports enhancement of external examining practice through new review
- UKRI: New deal for postgraduate research

Schools

- Ofsted to inspect delivery of Early Career Framework and National Professional Qualifications
- PAC: Financial sustainability of schools in England
- ONS: COVID-19 Schools Infection Survey, England: pupil antibody data, November to December 2021
- Mayor of London: Mayor launches campaign to help end violence against women and girls
- DCMS: Free cyber skills training for thousands of school pupils

Further Education & Skills

- DfE: Post-16 qualifications boosted to help more people to progress
- DCMS: Skills and connectivity boost for East Yorkshire and the Humber as region is named UK's fastest growing region for digital jobs
- PAC: DWP Employment Support: Kickstart Scheme
- Association of Colleges: Worst staffing crisis in two decades in England's colleges
- NFER: Action needed to ensure future workers have problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Sutton Trust: Engineering more socio-economically diverse than most other sectors, but barriers remain
- DCMS: European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative Leavers Survey Report 2016-2019
- ONS: NEET age 16 to 14, 2021
- DfE: Post-16 study at level 2 and below: call for evidence (Consultation outcome)

Higher Education

- DfE: Fairer higher education system for students and taxpayers
- Higher and Further Education Minister Michelle Donelan speech on the Augar Review
- DfE: Post-qualification admissions in higher education: proposed changes (Consultation outcome)
- DfE: Initial teacher training recruitment: candidate applications and numbers, February 2022
- HESA: Widening participation: UK Performance Indicators 2020/21
- Blackbullion: Student Money and Wellbeing 2022

Scotland

- Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation
- Removing face coverings in classrooms
- Record 95.5% of school leavers in positive destinations
- School leaver attainment and destinations

Wales

- Proposals to add to the categories of those required to register with the Education Workforce Council
- Major new projects announced to grow Welsh language
- Welsh Immersion Education: government response

Northern Ireland

- School Age Bill passes final stage
- McIlveen announces further measures to support childcare providers
- Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey – Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Lyons urges students in financial hardship to access support
- Publication of Higher Level Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland: Academic years 2017/18 – 2020/21

Consultation Watch

New consultations

- Lifelong loan entitlement Closes: 6 May 2022
- Higher Education reform Closes: 6 May 2022
- Review of post-15 qualifications at level 2 and below in England Closes: 27 April 2022
- Ofqual: Regulating academic and technical qualifications at level 3 Closes: 20 April 2022
- Wales: New registration categories for the Education Workforce Council Closes: 24 May 2022

Ongoing consultations

- Keeping children safe in education: proposed revisions 2022 Closes: 8 March 2022
- NI Department of Education: Consultation on Children and Young People's Strategy initial 3-year Delivery Plan 2021 – 2024 Closes: 9 March 2022
- Public Accounts Committee: Financial sustainability of the higher education sector in England Closes: 14 March 2022
- DfE: Teacher misconduct: regulating the teaching profession Closes: 14 March 2022
- OfS: A new approach to regulating student outcomes Closes: 17 March 2022
- The Teaching Excellence Framework Closes: 17 March 2022
- Constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation Closes: 17 March 2022
- Education Committee: Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) Closes: 17 March
- Education, Young People and Children Committee (Scottish Parliament): Impact of COVID on Education Closes: 25 March 2022
- Department for Education: School attendance: improving consistency of support Closes: 28 March 2022
- DfE: Revised behaviour in schools guidance and suspension and permanent exclusions guidance

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Closes: 31 March 2022

- [Wales: Changes to current school assessment arrangements and local authority prospectus](#)

Closes: 1 April 2022

- [DfE: Changes to the School Admission Appeals Code](#) Closes: 3 April 2022
- [Wales: Statutory induction of newly qualified teachers in Wales](#) Closes: 8 April 2022
- [Wales: Draft framework for Welsh in English medium education](#) Closes: 13 May 2022

What's happening in Parliament next week

Monday 7 March

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

- APPG for Nursery Schools, Nursery & Reception Classes. AGM and election of officers.

Tuesday 8 March

House of Commons

- Ten Minute Rule Motion: Institutes of Technology (Royal Charter) (Robert Buckland, Con, South Swindon)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

- APPG for Mental Health and APPG for Universal Credit. Joint meeting on mental health and the benefits system. (with Child Poverty Action Group)
- APPG for Apprenticeships. Report launch - Supporting apprenticeships in the Ministry of Defence

Wednesday 9 March

House of Commons

- Estimates Day (3rd Allotted): The Spending of the Department for Education on the National Tutoring Programme and Adult Education

House of Lords

- Baroness Hayman (Crossbench) to ask Her Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to introducing a national green skills strategy to ensure that the workforce has the necessary skills to meet the United Kingdom's net zero emissions commitments.
- Viscount Stansgate (Lab) to ask Her Majesty's Government whether they intend to join the Horizon Europe programme; and if not, why not.

Commons Committees:

- Public Services Committee: Designing a public services workforce fit for the future

All-Party Parliamentary Groups

- APPG on Child Contact Centres and Services
- APPG for T Levels. Boost the UK's productivity