

Further changes to secondary school performance tables

In an announcement that was overshadowed by the news that a grade 5 would be the new GCSE 'good pass', the DfE has changed its policy on the eligibility of legacy GCSEs to count towards Progress 8. Previously the policy stated that when reformed subjects were available for assessment, the legacy specifications that would no longer count towards performance tables were limited to English and maths only. However, the [DfE has now announced](#) that in order to "ensure that all students have access to the best qualifications and that there is consistency in terms of exams in these subjects", only the reformed GCSEs will be eligible for inclusion in the performance tables.

The DfE had already indicated that, for 2017 tables for English and maths GCSEs, the early entry requirements had been suspended. This is because schools would be able to have their students take the legacy qualifications and the reformed qualifications, with only the reformed qualifications counting – ie not the student's first entry. However, schools that offer a three-year curriculum programme for GCSEs may find that courses they have started will no longer count towards the tables and this could have a negative impact on their Progress 8 scores.

Fixing a Broken Training System: The case for an apprenticeship levy

"Should an apprenticeship be seen as important for successful job generation, productivity and wage growth? Yes: it can and should be a major contributor. But are the funding and tools in place which can actually make it so? Definitely not." In the week before the Budget, Professor Alison Wolf [published a paper](#) in conjunction with the Social Market Foundation (SMF) to call for an apprenticeship levy on business in order to fund apprenticeships. Whether or not Professor Wolf's paper actually influenced the Chancellor's decision to announce an apprenticeship levy on large businesses, or whether this policy had long been in the planning is currently unclear. Irrespective of the answer, the question about how the government intends to fund apprenticeship growth is no longer unclear.

The key features of the apprenticeship fund proposed by Alison Wolf include:

- Every employer would pay in via a small levy on payroll, similar to taxes in other EU countries with successful apprenticeship systems, such as Denmark, France and Austria.
- Anyone who employed an apprentice would be subsidised by the fund at levels well in excess of their own individual contribution.
- The employer of the apprentice would determine where that training took place, selecting from an approved list of institutions.

- The current policy of individual government contracts with 'training providers' to find and deliver 'completed' apprentices would cease. All apprenticeships would be funded through the apprenticeship fund, on the basis of an employer-apprentice contract.
- Government would also contribute to apprentice training costs, in order to cover the cost of the 'general education' part of the apprenticeship. It would do so by continuing to subsidise approved institutions which offer training. However, this money would reach institutions through a different funding stream, not through the fund.
- The apprenticeship fund would not be treated as a part of the general revenue.

In the summer [Budget](#) the Chancellor confirmed an apprenticeship levy will be introduced for large businesses. The budget speech announced the levy criticising the number of firms who do too little to train their staff, and reiterating the government's commitment to three million apprenticeship starts over the course of the parliament. In papers released accompanying the Budget, there was the announcement of another apprenticeship funding consultation, this time to consult on the "implementation of the levy", the payment of which would be operated through the digital voucher system briefly announced in the March Budget.

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Heading for the Precipice: the future of funding

“The current situation is financially unsustainable”. This stark conclusion comes from Professor Alison Wolf, government advisor and author of the coalition government’s review of vocational education, in a paper - [Heading for the Precipice](#) - that reviews the funding sustainability of current policies in Further and Higher Education.

Prepared for King’s College London’s *Issues and Ideas* series, Professor Wolf examines the recent history of the adult skills budget, the current situation for Further Education and Higher Education and she describes the immediate future. In concluding, she asks the question ‘does any of this make sense?’. In the introduction the scene is set with a description of a ‘concerning situation’ where the political elite remain deeply concerned about low productivity - a situation Professor Wolf describes as having often been the case for the last century and a half. However, despite this long-standing concern about low productivity, she describes as regrettable the fact that the post-19 education system is rarely discussed as an entity or an interlocking system. This lack of balance between discussions on Further and Higher Education, she argues, leads to inequality in terms of funding, but also to large shifts in provision, which occurs at the expense of quality and labour market relevance.

Some key points from the paper:

- Government spending on adult skills as a proportion of total government spending on education has been in decline since 2009/10
- There is no other single part of the central government budget, especially within the sphere of education, that has been subject to as much centrally-directed change as the adult skills budget, this could be due to two factors:
 - The sector lacks the powerful interest groups that can and do resist change - these interest groups are much stronger in schools and universities
 - Despite stubbornly low and declining funding, the expectations placed on the adult skills budget have been enormous, with that link to productivity from both the coalition government and the previous Labour administration
- In Higher Education, the funding institutions receive for teaching is more closely aligned to the funding systems for schools and 16-19 education, in that unlike the adult skills budget, there is a fixed amount of funding per student rather than a payment-by-results system relying on qualification or module achievement
- Funding streams for HE have been on an increasing trend
- The situation is financially unsustainable and deeply inequalitarian in the allocation of resources and the system does not produce the number of higher technician level qualifications that are needed
- Post-19 funding and provision should be looked at in a more integrated way.

“The Skills Agenda must take centre stage”

A new [Guide to the Skills System](#), aimed at parliamentarians, as well as the wider policy-making community, has been launched by the Skills Commission. Sponsored by OCR, the 157 Group and the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), the guide covers key areas including the public funding system, the role of employers, and the devolution of responsibilities for skills across the UK.

Launched at a reception in the House of Lords, with speakers including Anne-Marie Morris MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Skills Minister Nick Boles, and Tristram Hunt MP, the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, the report outlines six key messages for the

new Government, including the need to adopt greater systems thinking and boost employer engagement. It also calls for improvements to the quality and confidence of training and providers respectively, a smoother overall policy process, and calls for the provision of stability in the system and fair and sustainable funding.

The Skills Commission is an independent group of leading experts and opinion formers from across the education and skills sector who work to raise the profile of issues around the Further Education and skills sector.

As part of the Guide, a [Snapshot of the Skills System](#) wall chart is also available.

Accountability agenda stifling schools warns NUT

“The Government’s aims of bringing about an increased focus on English and maths and academic subjects, has been achieved at the cost of narrowing the curriculum that young people receive.” This is one of the messages from [Exam Factories](#) - a report commissioned by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in to the impact of accountability measures on children and young people.

The report outlines some of the potentially negative impacts of the current range of accountability measures in schools including Ofsted inspections, floor standards and school performance tables. Other findings from the research include:

- Recent accountability changes mean that in some cases secondary schools are entering pupils for academic examinations regardless of aptitudes or interests. This is contributing to disaffection and poor behaviour among some pupils.
- Pupils' increased attainment scores in tests are not necessarily reflected in an improvement in learning across the piece. Teaching can be very narrowly focused on the test.
- Teachers are witnessing unprecedented levels of school-related anxiety, stress and mental health problems amongst pupils, particularly around exam time. This is prevalent in secondary schools but also

in primaries.

- Accountability measures disproportionately affect disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities.

The research also warns that, under increasing pressure, teachers are spending a lot of time on accountability rather than teaching, but does suggest that secondary teachers believe that becoming an examiner helps to gain insight into the examination system and is a useful strategy to improve results.

The research project incorporated a survey of almost 8,000 teachers, a literature review and quantitative research utilising case studies of both heads and teachers (not all of whom are NUT members) and children.

Report calls for transformation of numeracy and data skills

A dramatic improvement in the UK population's mastery of basic numeracy and statistics needs to happen if the country is to take advantage of the data revolution now sweeping the globe. That's the verdict of a British Academy report *Count Us In: Quantitative Skills for a New Generation*.

The report claims that the UK risks falling behind in the race to tap the potential of "big data" – the way we handle the explosion in volume and variety of information now available and speed at which it can be processed - while

the countries' middling record in numeracy is creating skills deficits for employers and means many citizens and consumers lack the skills to make informed choices.

Count Us In offers a vision of how the UK can rise to the potentially transformational challenge of becoming a data-literate nation. It calls for a cultural change across all phases of education and employment, together with a concerted, continuous national effort led by government.

Students should apply to university after they get their exam results

A [report](#) from the University and College Union (UCU) claims seven in ten staff involved with university applications back a complete overhaul of the current system of when students apply to university. Less than a third of survey respondents thought that students understood how their UCAS application would be assessed and just 31% said they thought the UCAS process supports students to make the best application decisions according to their potential.

UCU believes an overhaul of the system would also address the problem of inaccurate predicted grades and abolish the need for unconditional offers for university places, which are under increasing scrutiny. Recent research highlights how only half of final A Level results matched estimates made by teachers earlier in the academic year, with almost one in 10 forecasts out by more than one grade. Just one in five students (21%) predicted to achieve ABB or better in 2014 actually did, compared to almost a third (32.2%) in 2010.

Higher Education: Integrity of academic standards must be maintained

A new model has been proposed for assessing quality in Higher Education (HE). HE is entering a period of rapid disruption which will create increasing diversity in its sector and its quality assurance system needs to be able to reflect the needs of all users in a diverse system with one size no longer fitting all.

The HE Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) new [consultation](#) sets out a common framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, stressing the importance of maintaining a UK-wide approach. The consultation proposes an approach of co-regulation with more emphasis placed on the responsibility of autonomous providers to safeguard academic standards and the

quality of the student experience. The consultation presents proposals and seeks responses in six areas:

1. Principles for a quality assessment system for established providers
2. Student academic experience for established providers
3. Academic output standards for established providers
4. When things go wrong in established providers
5. Excellence and innovation in learning and teaching
6. Gateways into the higher education system for new providers.

Contact policy@ocr.org.uk for further information.

New curriculum for Wales gets go-ahead

The Welsh Government has announced that it will accept all 68 recommendations in [Successful Futures](#) - Professor Graham Donaldson's far-reaching, independent report on curriculum and assessment review in Wales. The recommendations include fewer tests, scrapping 'key stages' and a greater focus on computing and IT.

Regional Education Consortia will be asked to identify primary and secondary Pioneer Schools who will be invited to take the lead on the development and design of the new curriculum, working with experts from Wales and internationally. Schools will be expected to follow a central curriculum rather than be given the wider freedom granted to academies in England.

The Wales Education Minister, Huw Lewis, confirmed that he will publish a framework for the implementation of the new curriculum in the autumn 2015.

“Validity of qualifications is at the heart of what we do” says Ofqual

Ofqual believes it has developed more effective regulatory approaches and dealt with standards issues immediately as they have arisen in its work on vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland over the last two years. Its [annual report](#) to the Northern Ireland Assembly, provides an overview of its standards work and regulatory improvements, and highlights the increasing proportion of its time and resource spent on detection and prevention rather than on more reactive work.

The report makes reference to Ofqual's regulatory role in Northern Ireland for vocational qualifications and how it ensures the qualifications it regulates are of the right standard and that the qualifications system works well so that those who take or rely on qualifications can have confidence in them.

Nearly 500,000 Ofqual-regulated vocational qualifications were awarded in Northern Ireland over the last three years.

The Last Word

Paul Steer, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, comments on some of the issues featured in this issue.

Alison Wolf's think piece on adult education warns of a system on the brink of collapse through underfunding and political neglect. In *Heading for the Precipice: Can Further and Higher Education Funding Policies Be Sustained?*, she argues that current arrangements for educating and training adults are deeply inegalitarian and unlikely to deliver the high level technical and professional qualifications needed to boost the UK's notoriously poor levels of productivity. She argues that adult education in FE has long been overlooked because it lacks the power and influence of those who lobby for schools and Higher Education.

Many of these arguments apply more broadly to FE and the skills system as described in the Skills Commission's *Guide to the Skills System* which describes the importance, scale and interconnectedness of the system with great clarity, supported by a string of impressive statistics and helpful infographics.

Amongst other things, the guide makes clear the contribution Further Education and training providers make to developing the skills of those young people, sometimes described as 'the forgotten half', who don't follow a traditional A Level route. For example, it states that: 51 percent of 16-18 year olds in education and training follow vocational and technical training programmes; and that each year colleges educate and train over 3.1 million people. Interestingly, of all 16-18 year olds, currently around 6 percent of them start apprenticeships.

All this needs to be understood and taken into account when drawing up plans to attain the target of 3 million apprenticeships within the lifetime of this parliament. We have to be sure that plans for a digital levy on employers to fund apprenticeships will cut through some of the complexity of the skills system rather than add new and conflicting incentives and bureaucracy. We also have to recognise that many young people simply aren't ready to embark on apprenticeships and that there must be programmes available that develop their skills and widen their appreciation of the future career choices available to them. This is partly about taking care to have a 'pipeline' that will feed into a growing number of apprenticeships but it is also about securing alternatives to apprenticeships - alternatives that will lead to those higher level technical qualifications that Alison Wolf has identified as being so crucial.

2017 subjects under consultation

Ofqual and the DfE have launched [consultations](#) on revised subject content for GCSEs, AS and A Levels for first teaching in September 2017 – the third phase of general qualification reforms.

[Subject content proposals](#) are now available for:

- Astronomy GCSE
- Business GCSE
- Design and Technology AS and A Level
- Economics GCSE
- Engineering GCSE
- Environmental Science AS and A Level
- Geology GCSE

- History of Art AS and A Level
- Music Technology AS and A Level
- Philosophy AS and A Level
- Psychology GCSE
- Sociology GCSE.

An additional consultation will be published in the autumn with content for the remaining subjects to be taught from September 2017.

Contact policy@ocr.org.uk for further information on OCR's responses.

“Qualifications are the mirror of education, not the education itself”

In its [annual report and accounts](#), Ofqual is very clear about the importance of both general and vocational qualifications, but at the same time recognises that qualifications need to be considered as part of the wider education system.

The report follows on from its earlier Corporate Plan (see [April edition of OCR Policy Briefing](#)) setting out the progress made towards its priorities: developing its regulatory approach; increasing focus on vocational qualifications; reforming general qualifications; taking action to increase the validity of assessments; and developing rules and enforcements.

Ofqual's future priorities include a greater emphasis on risk management increasing its focus on the parts of the qualification system where the risks are greatest. The 12 areas currently on its strategic risk register are:

- Validity of qualifications

- Malpractice
- Market instability as a result of reform
- Regulatory strategy
- Reform of GCSEs, AS and A Levels (including accreditation)
- Apprenticeship assessment risks
- Funding (ie resources)
- People (ie capability and capacity)
- Delivering the National Reference Tests
- Information Management Transformation Programme
- Delivery risks – summer awarding 2015
- Standards risks – summer awarding 2015.

Ofqual states that this risk-based focus will help it to set clear priorities and manage its limited resources effectively.