

New technical routes aim to revolutionise post-16 education

The recommendations in the much-anticipated Sainsbury report on technical education have been accepted by the government as part of its post-16 [Skills Plan](#).

Setting out the overarching framework for the skills system, Nick Boles, (the former) Skills Minister, called for a “fundamental shift” in technical education to prepare individuals for skilled employment.

From 2019, every young person will be presented with a choice at age 16: the academic or the technical option with bridging provision established to enable individuals to move, in either direction, between the options. Plans include:

- Technical education will be either employment-based (typically an apprenticeship) or college-based (two year, full-time study programme)
- A common framework of 15 routes* will be established to encompass all employment-based and college-based technical education at levels 2 to 5
- A single, nationally recognised certificate for each technical education route at levels 2 and 3 will be offered and awarded by a single body or consortium, under a licence covering a fixed period of time following an open competition
- Every college-based route will begin with a two-year programme suitable for 16–18 year olds (although some individuals may take more or less time to complete it) starting with a common core (including digital skills) aligned to apprenticeships
- Additional, occupation-specific maths and English requirements will be incorporated into the standards for each route
- After the common core, individuals will specialise to

prepare for entry into an occupation

- Employer-designed standards will be at the heart of the technical education system “to give status and credibility”, with support from education experts
- Every 16-18 year old college-based student will be entitled to work experience
- Individuals who are not ready to access a technical education route at age 16 will be offered a ‘transition year’ to help them to prepare for further study or employment
- The new, employer-led Institute for Apprenticeships will regulate quality across apprenticeships and its remit will be extended to cover all technical education at levels 2 to 5. The renamed Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will be fully operational by April 2017.

Reforms will be phased in progressively with first standards available for first delivery in September 2019. A more detailed timetable for reform will be published later in the year.

*The 15 routes:

1. Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care
2. Business and Administrative
3. Catering and Hospitality
4. Childcare and Education
5. Construction
6. Creative and Design
7. Digital
8. Engineering and Manufacturing
9. Hair and Beauty
10. Health and Science
11. Legal, Finance and Accounting
12. Protective Services
13. Sales, Marketing and Procurement
14. Social Care
15. Transport and Logistics

DfE takes on Further and Higher Education

The Department for Education (DfE) has taken on responsibility for Further Education, skills, apprenticeships and Higher Education following the recent government restructuring.

This will increase the size of the Department’s remit significantly when the additional policy areas are transferred from the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Justine Greening is the new Secretary of State for

Education, with Nick Gibb retaining his Schools Minister role. The new Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills is Robert Halfon. BIS has now become the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and will be headed up by a new Secretary of State - Greg Clark.

The Education Select Committee has welcomed the Departmental restructure having recently joined forces with the BIS Committee to consider how all stages of education can have the best possible impact on business and the economy.

Also in this issue:

> Area reviews > Enquiries and appeals > Qualifications perceptions survey > Compulsory maths to 18?
> Access to A Levels > Careers guidance > Teacher shortages > Digital strategy > GCSE grading in NI > The Last Word

Area reviews under scrutiny

The progress and effectiveness of post-16 education area reviews will be scrutinised in a [new inquiry](#).

The Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy will look at the impact of area reviews on the Further Education sector including proposed institutional mergers already announced.

It will also examine the absence of other education providers from the reviews, such as school sixth-forms, as well as ask questions about apprenticeship provision, and the role of local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Regional Schools Commissioners.

Area reviews, which began last year, are intended to secure for the future post-16 institutions which are financially viable, sustainable, resilient and efficient, and that meet local education and economic needs.

Enquiries and appeals consultation continues

Ofqual will continue to consult on a number of decisions on changes to the GCSE and A Level enquiries and appeals system. These include:

- When the requirement for exam boards to make marked GCSE scripts available to centres should be introduced
- The detail of the framework to be used by exam boards to set dates for completion of reviews and appeals
- When the requirement for learners to be able to ask for the results of centre-marked assessments should be introduced
- When the automatic grade protection that currently applies following a review of moderation will be removed.

The following announcements have been made:

- A Level physics, rather than maths, will be included along with religious studies and geography in this summer's pilot to test the new appeals process following a review
- Exam boards must provide the reasons for marking review decisions on request, but there will be no express requirement to do this within a specific timescale in 2016
- Reviewers, when deciding whether the first mark should stand, should consider whether the first marker made any administrative errors, properly applied the mark scheme and exercised their academic judgement appropriately.

Ofqual has developed a [postcard](#) to help explain the changes.

Confidence in GCSEs and A Levels holds firm despite concerns about ongoing reforms

Whilst there is confidence in GCSEs and A Levels, there are concerns around marking, enquiries about results and the amount of reform in the system.

These are some of the findings from Ofqual's [annual survey](#) of the qualifications system in England. The research looks in to the perceptions of A Levels, GCSE and other academic and vocational qualifications by head teachers, teachers, the general public, parents, students, employers and Higher Education.

The survey showed that GCSEs and A Levels are seen as trusted qualifications providing good indications of a candidate's suitability for employment or further study. Other findings include:

- Stakeholder views on the accuracy of marking of GCSEs remain mixed with confidence in the maintenance of standards varying by stakeholder group
- Headteachers believe that the enquiries about results

system, currently undergoing change, is not fair and more awareness of the reviews and appeals system is needed amongst parents and students

- Headteachers and teachers continue to agree that there is too much change in GCSE and A Level systems, although parents, employers and HE thought that reform was needed. The survey revealed that more needs to be done to raise understanding of the new GCSE grading system including what constitutes a 'good pass', particularly amongst employers.

Sally Collier, the new Chief Regulator added: "these qualifications are going through reform and it is apparent that we need to do more to build awareness and understanding of some of the changes today in order to maintain those perceptions of trusted qualifications into the future".

Compulsory maths to age 18?

A [review](#) to consider the potential for extending the study of mathematics beyond age 16 is underway.

As reported in March's [OCR Policy Briefing](#), the Government has asked Professor Sir Adrian Smith to review the case for how to improve the nature and scale of the study of maths from 16 to 18.

The investigation will identify gaps in provision and potential new pathways. It will also examine ways to increase take up including identifying key delivery barriers such as teacher supply, financial constraints and the use of technology, and how these might be overcome.

The review will report by the end of 2016.

Glass Ceilings: access to A Levels

A new report claims to highlight regional differences in the proportion of pupils studying A Levels in state schools.

[Glass Ceilings](#) published by the New Schools Network - a charity that promotes the creation of free schools - analysed A Level provision across the country and claims that the lack of access to A Levels in some areas of England blocks the route to Higher Education and the high-skills jobs market for many 16 year olds.

Findings include:

- Low rates of A Level participation are evident in urban, coastal and rural areas including Rutland, Portsmouth, Barnsley, Salford and Lambeth. Some areas are at risk of losing A Level provision.
- Access to local high-quality provision is scarce, and

in some places non-existent, with no provision rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

- Poor patterns of provision tend to be found in the most deprived areas of the country.
- New, high quality provision is needed at 16-19, but also at secondary school level, especially in the most deprived areas.

The report recommends that free schools can make an impact in improving access to A Levels.

The New Schools Network is a charity that aims to improve the quality of education - particularly for the most deprived - by increasing the number of independent, innovative schools within the state sector.

“Careers advice is little more than a poorly thought out add-on” says Committee Chair

Inadequate careers guidance in many English schools is exacerbating skills shortages and having a negative impact on the country's productivity, the Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy has concluded.

In its [report of its inquiry](#) into careers education, information, advice and guidance, the Sub-Committee urges the government to incentivise schools to improve, which includes Ofsted downgrading where careers provision is sub-standard.

The Sub-Committee found that too many young people are leaving education without having had the chance to fully consider their future options or how their skills and experiences fit with opportunities in the jobs market.

It also judged that a host of policy changes, initiatives and new bodies introduced in recent years have failed

to make serious improvements and in some cases have even been counter-productive.

Report recommendations include:

- The promotion of legislation to require schools to collaborate with training providers
- A relevant level 6 qualification, at a minimum, for those delivering advice and guidance in schools
- Meaningful work experience for all students at key stage 4 and effective delivery through key stage 5 study plans
- Improvements to destination data.

The Sub-Committee welcomes the government's intention to publish a careers strategy and argues that it is a timely opportunity to finally get careers provision right.

New chief inspector of schools will face issue of teacher shortages

Having sufficient teachers to meet the needs of schools will be one of the issues that the new Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman, will face.

According to a [report by the Public Accounts Committee](#), an urgent review of teacher training in England is needed to address the difficulties schools face in recruiting teachers.

Whilst the Committee recognises that the recent education White Paper may address some of the challenges, the report concludes:

- The DfE has missed its targets to fill teacher training places for 4 years running with significant shortfalls in some subjects. This means that lessons in some important subjects are being taught by teachers without relevant post A Level qualifications
- There is significant local variation across the country

in teacher recruitment

- Recent expensive methods for recruiting teachers are experimental, evolving and lack coherence with little evidence that they result in more, better quality teachers.

The Education Select Committee has welcomed the publication of the report and will consider the findings in its own [inquiry into the supply of teachers](#).

Meanwhile, a [professional development standard](#) for teacher training has been published by the DfE. This follows a review of the core content and behaviour management content for initial teacher training following the [Carter report](#) in January 2015. The standard also recognises the importance of continuous professional development beyond the initial teacher training year.

“Digital strategy should be published without delay” say MPs

Systemic problems with digital education and training need to be addressed as a matter of urgency in the government’s forthcoming digital strategy, according to the Science and Technology Select Committee.

Following its inquiry examining the digital skills gap, the Committee has published its [report](#) addressing the key areas that the digital strategy must deliver in order to halt the current “crisis” that it claims is present in all stages of digital education. Recommendations for education and training include:

- Digital Colleges should be developed across the country to replicate the National College for Digital Skills (reported in May’s [OCR Policy Briefing](#))
- Apprenticeships need to be closely aligned with industry requirements for the digital sector
- The Government should set targets for recruiting teachers in Computer Science, review the case for financial incentives and invest in teacher training for the delivery of the computing curriculum
- Ofsted should include the computing curriculum spe-

cifically in inspections and require schools to deliver plans for embedding computing

- An employer forum should be established to discuss priorities for ensuring the computing curriculum and its teaching stay up to date
- Improved industry-led careers advice should be available in schools, FE and universities.

This inquiry builds on last year’s Lord’s Select Committee report [Make or Break: The UK’s Digital Future](#) which was a call to action for the Government for an ambitious approach to securing the UK’s digital economy, as well as the current BIS [inquiry](#).

The Tech Partnership - a network of employers collaborating to create the skills for the digital economy – has recently carried out a [consultation on basic digital skills standards](#) on behalf of the (former) Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. This work takes forward a recommendation from a recent [review](#) of publicly funded digital skills qualifications.

Policy change in Northern Ireland for new 9 to 1 GCSEs

Reformed GCSEs graded 9 to 1 can be used in Northern Ireland from September 2016.

This [announcement](#) from the new Minister of Education in Northern Ireland, Peter Weir, reverses a decision, made in November 2015, to only allow the teaching of unreformed GCSEs graded A* to G. The announcement follows concerns around the comparability and portability of GCSEs, and the continuance of the open qualifications market in Northern Ireland.

Policy for AS/A Levels in Northern Ireland, which already allowed schools and colleges to teach new AS/A Levels developed for England, remains unchanged.

The Last Word

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

Good luck and congratulations to Justine Greening on her new appointment. So she is the first person in charge of the state education system who has had direct experience of an ordinary state school – admittedly it doesn't guarantee anything but feels like a step forward.

It's also good to see responsibility for Further and Higher Education back at the DfE. It makes so much more sense to have one department responsible for education and training and it should lead to more joined up decision making, especially in relation to provision for 14-19 year olds. Justine will need to make sure, however, that under her watch, skills and the Further Education sector get the full attention from the Department they deserve. The tendency for political and financial priorities to gravitate towards schools and academic learning is well-known. For example, how much time does Ofqual apportion to vocational qualifications compared to GCSEs and A Levels?

The Sainsbury Report and the BIS Plan for Post 16 Skills is a very big deal. They could signal the biggest change in vocational education since the introduction of BTECs. There is much to say on the report but the key point is that this is a hugely ambitious, potentially destabilising set of proposals at a time when money is short and other political priorities are to the fore. The emphasis on the technical route is long overdue but this mustn't be at the expense of the increasingly successful 'applied general' route which mixes A Level and vocational study to prepare people for Higher Education. Some sense of the scale, cost and remit of an expanded Institute for Apprenticeships needs to be fleshed out – a lot is being asked of this putative organisation at a time when its 'shadow' body is making something of a hash of apprenticeship reform.

If the Skills Plan is to be enacted upon it would benefit from a bit more consultation with young people. They might help develop some deeper thinking about how to make sure young people don't face a cliff edge at 16 where they fall into the only routes available rather than the ones that fit with their skills and motivation. And this is a heightened risk given that, as the sub-committee on Education, Skills and the Economy puts it: "Careers advice is little more than a poorly thought out add-on".

It's best not to comment on the Sainsbury report's proposals to franchise technical qualifications to single awarding organisations other than to say it looks like one big headache for all involved. Others with less obvious self-interest than the exam boards will make their own minds up.

The success of Sainsbury's new technical routes will depend hugely on having the right regional infrastructure

to deliver them. This makes the outcomes of the current area reviews of FE colleges even more critical – the area reviews will have to be about curriculum reforms as much as they are about institutional reforms, moving a lot of general FE into specialist FE. There are a variety of opinions about how well the reviews are proceeding, although there is plenty of evidence that they are taking longer than intended and are proving hugely complex, requiring the balancing of a wide range of stakeholder interests, fiscal challenges and the gathering and interpretation of shedloads of data. The forthcoming Select Committee inquiry into area reviews is timely and let's hope it sheds some light into the murk.

On balance, the Ofqual survey on confidence levels in GCSEs and GCEs is reassuring. Compared to many of our other 'national institutions', our exams system actually has quite a good approval rating. The survey does highlight some perceptions that the accuracy of marking of GCSEs could be improved; as levels of public scrutiny tighten year on year, the boards have a responsibility to be as transparent as possible and to continue to tighten and refine what are already incredibly thorough quality assurance processes. We are doing our bit and our webpages on [Explaining Examining](#) are well worth a visit. The short animated videos on this site are becoming a very popular feature at school assemblies.

We are lucky to have Professor Adrian Smith looking into the matter of the compulsory study of mathematics post 16. There is broad consensus that people should continue with maths study beyond 16. The tricky bit is deciding what *sort* of maths, how to pay for it, and where to find the maths teachers. But Professor Smith is a wise man with an impeccable record for looking into such matters.

There is just enough space to congratulate Amanda Spielman on her appointment as Chief Inspector at Ofsted despite the strong reservations of the Education Select Committee. It may be true that her performance before the Committee wasn't her finest hour and that it is true she has never been a teacher. But otherwise she has a very solid track record and a reputation for quiet competence. Maybe the Committee had grown to expect a certain type of Chief Inspector of Schools – male, hectoring and with a tendency to ride their own hobby horses. We wait to see how she performs in her new role, but it may be that teachers will come to appreciate a quieter, less bullying tone – and an Ofsted that welcomes and nurtures the teaching profession rather than driving it away.

Read our [blog](#) for further reflections on the post 16 Skills Plan and Sainsbury Review.