**Academy and School News Update January 1-30 2015**

***Documents mentioned below can be found on*** <http://tonystephens.org.uk>

* More than a quarter of teachers have been denied salary increases after the introduction of the new system of **performance-related pay** in schools, a new survey finds. The study into the impact of the radical pay reforms also shows that almost nine out of 10 teachers who were refused an increase were not warned in advance, despite DfE guidance calling on schools to use a “no surprises” approach. Ethnic minority teachers and those were working in primaries were most likely to miss out, the poll of almost 5,000 teachers by the NUT reveals. Of the teachers who had been notified of their pay decision, 28 per cent were denied an increase. Among Asian and black teachers, this rose to 40 per cent and 34 per cent respectively.
* The National Audit Office (NAO) has issued its first “adverse opinion” in a decade on the **DfE’s accounts**, stating there is a significant level of “error and uncertainty” in their financial statements. The public spending watchdog has warned the government department, stating that it does not think the figures give a “true and fair” reflection of its financial activity.
* **Qualifications could be linked to tax data** to show the “true worth” of certain subjects as part of the government’s drive to track students after they leave school, the education secretary has said   
    
  Nicky Morgan also said that **technology** could transform accountability, assessment and teachers’ workload in the future.  Ms Morgan said that change was needed in the way schools were held to account, adding: “We have an analogue system in the digital age."  
  Technology could also help to reduce teachers’ workload she said, stating that technology could “streamline” two of the biggest burdens on teachers – lesson planning and marking. “On my regular tours of schools across the country, teachers have shown me apps that can scan and mark almost instantly – saving hours of work,” she said. Lesson plans are increasingly being curated, Ms Morgan added, helping to “reduce duplication” in the system and helping to “spread good practice from school to school”. She also highlighted how technology could change how students are assessed in the future, citing the work of educationist John Hattie, which uses regular testing to ascertain how students are progressing. “By using technology to administer regular standardised tests, he has transformed the way children learn and the way parents are able to monitor their child’s progress,” Ms Morgan said. “New York City’s School of One does much the same thing. It provides real-time feedback to parents through pupil-specific algorithms for maths. Each day the parent can see areas for improvement and track day-to-day progress. This is vital."  
    
  The minister has also announced £3.6 million in funding to help **train teachers in** **computing skills**, supported by major tech firms such as Google and O2.  Experts from the companies will provide resources and training to help teachers deliver the new computing curriculum, she said. These latest projects will complement ongoing sector-led work funded by the government to train teachers in how to deliver the new curriculum, including:
  + providing the British Computer Society (BCS) with more than £2 million to set up a network of 400 ‘master teachers’ to train teachers in other schools and provide resources for use in the classroom
  + providing £1.1 million to Computing at School to help train primary teachers already working in the classroom through online resources and school workshops
  + increasing bursaries for those wanting to become computing teachers
  + introducing computing teacher training scholarships of £25,000 - backed by Microsoft, Google, IBM and Facebook - to encourage more of the very best graduates to become teachers

The DfE is match-funding all the projects as part of a £3.6 million package support to schools. A £500,000 fund was launched by DfE in February 2014, with industry groups and computing organisations invited to submit proposals for training projects that would be match-funded.

* Schools should stop **wasting money buying iPads** and other “shiny gadgets” for pupils and instead hire more teachers, the leader of Britain’s largest headteachers’ organisation says today. A quarter of a billion pounds a year is being spent on computers in schools, according to the latest figures from Besa, the educational suppliers’ organisation. This is enough to pay the wages of more than 8,000 teachers or build 40 secondary schools, according to Russell Hobby, general secretary of the NAHT. In a personal blog, he asks whether the spending “can ... possibly be justified at a time of austerity”. He adds: “I think we’d be better spending the money on recruiting and training great teachers and sticking them in front of old-fashioned blackboards.”
* Ministers should rethink their proposed reforms to **primary league tables** and focus on pupils' progress rather than attainment, a report released today has said.  As of next year, primary schools will be held to account by a tougher regime with at least 85 per cent of Year 6 pupils expected to reach the required standards, up from the current 65 per cent threshold. Like now, schools not reaching this threshold will be judged on the progress of their pupils, but as the threshold rises it will become more important for schools to ensure pupils make good progress. Now the think tank CentreForum has called for the government to adopt the progress measure as its headline accountability measure, claiming judging schools by their pupils' progress was the "fairest" measure.
* Grindon Hall **free school** has been placed in to special measures. The school is the second free school to be placed into special measures in as many days, after the Durham Free School was judged inadequate yesterday. Durham Free School has now been ordered to close by education secretary Nicky Morgan. Earlier this month, [Grindon Hall was warned over its finances](https://news.tes.co.uk/b/news/2015/01/09/former-private-school-warned-over-finances.aspx) and had to be bailed out by the DfE. The chief inspector of schools has been forced to deny that [Ofsted](http://www.theguardian.com/education/ofsted) had a political agenda against Christian schools after he came under fire from MPs following the damning reports by inspectors for two free schools.

However, Ofsted judged Al-Madinah School free school in Derby as “requires improvement” last week, after last year ruling that it was inadequate.

* More than half of school staff (57 per cent) think their pupils **read for pleasure** less often than they and their classmates did when they were children. Two-fifths predict that children will read less in 10 years' time than they do today. There are also signs that parents are not encouraging the activity – almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of those polled said that mothers and fathers were less involved in motivating children to read than they were 10 years ago.

The Booktrust charity is running the **“The Read for My School” competition**, which challenges seven- to 13-year-olds to read as many books as they can in two months. Last year, more than 3,600 schools took part, with around 212,000 youngsters reading a total of 876,000 books. The competition runs from January 20 until March 20. There is a free online library of more than 150 books that can be read on computers, tablets and other mobile devices; as well as the free online library, pupils can read any book offline as long as it fits into one of eight categories, including humour, adventure and real-life.

* Children are being put at risk of harm because of the length of time it is taking to complete vital **safeguarding assessments** by “understaffed” local authorities, headteachers have warned. Almost one in five heads said that referrals to children’s social care departments are taking longer than the 45 days stipulated in government guidance, according to a poll of more than 1,100 school leaders.
* Practical guidance on how to deal with unruly pupils in the classroom should be an integral part of teacher training, according to a new report. The [**Carter review**](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carter-review-of-initial-teacher-training) of initial teacher training (ITT), says that learning how to manage behaviour effectively is vital for trainees.
* The world’s richest countries are spending billions of pounds on education reforms but rarely **check whether they have worked**, according to a major study published today. The report from the OECD looked at 450 education reforms introduced across its 34 member countries between 2008 and 2014. But it found that “once new policies are adopted, there is little follow-up” and that only 10 per cent of the reforms examined had “been evaluated for their impact”. The report also finds that policies aimed at changing teaching practice are more effective than reforms that only look at school structures or resources. The importance of giving teachers adequate training and explanations to ensure they are behind a new approach is also stressed.
* Too many schools are **flouting admissions rules** and local authorities are often failing to carry out adequate checks, the chief schools adjudicator warned today. Schools that control their own admissions, such as academies, “often” ask parents questions banned under the statutory admissions code. They are also failing to publish and consult on their admissions arrangements, according to the latest [annual report from the Office of the Schools Adjudicator](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/osa-annual-report)**.**
* Britain’s first school for **lesbian and gay students** could be opened in Manchester under plans drawn up by a charity. LGBT Youth North West is looking at a number of options to extend its provision for young people, and strategic director Amelia Lee said opening a new school was one of those under consideration.
* Significant numbers of schools will ignore controversial **A-level reforms** by continuing to make AS-levels a central part of the timetable, a poll suggests. Changes being introduced from September will mean that AS-levels no longer count towards final A-level grades. Ministers hope this will cut the number of exams being taken in sixth forms and allow more time for deeper learning. But a survey of almost 500 schools by Ucas finds that a significant number plan to retain AS-levels as an integral part of A-level courses.
* Ucas is warning that some students applying for places may be disadvantaged by the **uneven and confusing wave of A-level exam changes** taking place later this year. In a survey of 500 secondary schools, Ucas found many unsure how to respond to the A-level changes in England, which strip out AS-level exams as part of A-level grades and introduce a series of new two-year linear exams from September this year until 2017. Ucas warned that the mixture of new and old-style exams, some including modular AS-levels and some not, will not be over until 2020. “Universities and colleges should review their admissions practices in light of qualification reform happening around the UK to ensure that students are not disadvantaged as a result of curriculum choices made by their schools or colleges,” Ucas recommended to universities as part of its analysis.
* The provision of **PE lessons in schools** has fallen to less than two hours a week under the coalition government, prompting concerns that the outlook for physical activity among young people was “bleak and worrying”. Despite demands for politicians to capitalise on the legacy of the London 2012 Olympics, a survey of schools – conducted by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) – found that PE has actually declined since 2010, leading to calls for action to counter the “inactivity crisis” among young people.
* Schools could be pushed to breaking over the next decade by the need to provide almost a **million more places for pupils**, town hall chiefs have warned. The continuing squeeze on places could lead to a "tipping point" where there is no money or space left to expand schools any further, according to the Local Government Association. Official figures predict that there may be around 900,000 extra pupils in England's schools over the next decade.
* Two-thirds of teachers are worried their students know more about **computing** than they do, a poll has found, leading to calls for staff to be given more training in the subject. The survey, commissioned by Microsoft and subject association Computing at School, also revealed that more than eight out of 10 teachers wanted more training and development after the first term of teaching the new subject.
* Science teachers are backing controversial changes to **A-level and GCSE science** **practical work**, according to England’s big three school exam boards. Ofqual’s plan to stop assessment of practicals contributing to overall grades in both types of exams is [widely opposed by science groups](https://news.tes.co.uk/b/news/2015/01/08/science-practical-changes-have-great-potential-for-damage-experts-warn.aspx), who fear it will lead to laboratory experiments being downgraded in schools. But OCR and AQA, which has lobbied for the new approach, says that teachers like the idea when they have been presented with the details during trials. Now Nicky Morgan has revealed that she agrees with the criticisms of the proposed changes. “While I fully understand the concerns Ofqual have in ensuring that assessment remains rigorous and resistant to gaming, I am concerned that a decision to remove practical assessment from science qualifications is in danger of holding back the next generation of scientists,”. “Like many in our scientific community, I fear that such a move could inadvertently downgrade the importance of these practical skills, leaving a generation of chemists, physicists and biologists who leave schools with excellent theoretical knowledge, but are unable to perform key practical experiments which form the basis of a future research career.” Her comments leave Ofqual in a difficult position. The watchdog is supposed to be independent from the DfE but ministers decide its funding levels and appoint the chief regulator. However, Ofqual seems to be sticking to its guns over the science proposals, stating that they were “designed to invigorate the hands-on learning experience of students and equip them for a future in science”.
* A **gulf in pay** between teachers and other professions has opened up under the current government, according to new research. A report commissioned by the NASUWT union argues that trainee teachers earn a starting salary which is 20 per cent lower than the average earned by their peers working for major graduate recruiters in sectors such as finance, law and retail. And the gap appears to widen with time: after three years in the job, the average salaries of recruits to other sectors have risen 73 per cent faster than those of school teachers, according to the Incomes Data Services report.
* A national programme has been launched to **improve links between schools and** **universities** and demystify the Oxbridge application process. The £22 million scheme, run by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce), will provide information on university outreach activities, including taster sessions and summer schools, as well as advice and support on areas such as applications and student finance. The launch comes four years after the demise of Aim higher, which also aimed to encourage more people into higher education but fell victim to government cuts in 2011. Funding for the successor project is less than a third of Aim higher’s final-year budget of £78 million. Unlike Aim higher, the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach scheme will not give any money to schools, but will instead fund 35 local hubs, providing a single point of contact for schools. Each will have its own website, expected to be up and running by March. In addition to the local networks, three national hubs will focus on applications to Oxbridge and giving assistance to care leavers and older students.
* Two-fifths of 13- and 14-year-olds regularly skip **breakfast** on school days, with girls and pupils from poor homes most likely to miss the first meal of the day, a major government study shows. More than one in 10 children (15 per cent) “never” eat breakfast during a typical school week, according to interviews with a representative sample of 13,100 Year 9s in England.
* Ofsted has **failed to ensure school inspection judgements are reliable**, with some inspectors basing their decisions on a “narrow range of data”, one of the watchdog’s leading officials has admitted. National director for schools Sean Harford has publicly acknowledged for the first time that the inspectorate does not “directly [ensure] that different inspectors in the [same] school on the same day would give the same judgement”. This follows news that that Ofsted is carrying out “reliability testing” in pilot inspections this term, in order to assess consistency between different teams of inspectors. Under the new plans, two inspectors will be sent into a school on the same day to conduct independent inspections, with their findings and judgments compared. The “weakest” inspectors, Mr Harford writes, “have been guilty of using the published data as a safety net for not making fully rounded, professional judgements”.
* More than nine out of 10 parents believe students should not be taught be **unqualified teachers**, a new survey has revealed. Out of more than 1,000 parents surveyed by the NASUWT union, 95 per cent said it was important that children are taught by “professionally qualified” members of staff.
* The head of one of England’s big three exam boards has hit back against a government threat to **end all competition between awarding bodies**. Mark Dawe, chief executive of OCR, has spoken out after a warning that ministers are dusting off plans to have single exam boards for each subject amid fears of falling standards.  Ministers are considering the move after a public spat by exam boards over practice papers produced for new maths GCSEs. The OCR and Edexcel boards had complained that the papers from rival board AQA were too easy.
* Secondary schools should create a **“head of well-being”** post to combat poor physical and mental health among students and staff, it has been suggested. A study by think-tank 2020health and charity Nuffield Health found that creating such a role could improve exercise levels, reduce obesity and boost emotional health. Nuffield Health will fund the first pilot of a head of well-being at a UK secondary school from September. 2020health has compiled figures showing that three out of four young people living with mental illnesses go undiagnosed, and a similar number of teachers feel the job has a negative impact on their health. The report calls for schools to regularly measure pupil well-being and to give teachers additional training to help them spot the warning signs of mental illness in young people.
* Ministers have been told by a parliamentary watchdog to do more to control the “**excessive” pay levels enjoyed by some state-school heads**. The government risks undermining its own policy of public pay restraint by giving schools and other state institutions autonomy over staff salaries, according to a report published today by the Public Accounts Committee.
* A loophole that exempts thousands of schools from following **new healthy food** **standards for school meals** must be closed, town hall leaders have said. More than two million pupils attend schools that do not have to comply with new standards designed to restrict the amount of fried or pastry-based food served to children, according to the Local Government Association (LGA). New tougher rules for school meals come into force this week, but do not apply to about 4,000 schools that became academies between September 2010 and 2014. The standards come at the same time as Public Health England [launched a campaign](https://sugarswaps.change4life.co.uk/) to encourage parents to cut back on the amount of sugar they give to children. The new regulations call on schools to promote drinking water and limit servings of fruit juice. Schools will have to ensure there is at least one portion of vegetables or salad available every day. And there must be no more than two portions of fried food in a week.

***A copy of the guide to school food standards is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* Thousands of cash-strapped teachers are **opting out of pensions** because of an increase in monthly contributions, while schools could be forced to cut staff to balance their books. It has been revealed that the number of teachers quitting the Teachers’ Pension Scheme (TPS) between April and August 2014 increased by 46 per cent from the previous year. Over half of those who left the scheme cited “personal financial reasons” for their decision. Over the last decade, teachers have faced a real-terms pay cut of more than 10 per cent. Schools will also see their TPS contributions increase by 2.4 per cent in September. Headteachers have warned that this change, combined with a rise in National Insurance bills the following year, could force them to cut staff to save money.
* According to **recent child protection guidance**, schools should not employ staff who live with someone convicted of a violent or sexual crime. Around 300 school staff complying with newly enforced disclosure have been suspended from their jobs. They will be allowed to return to work if they obtain a waiver of the regulation from [Ofsted](http://www.theguardian.com/education/ofsted). But the application process takes up to two months, leaving some schools short-staffed while experienced teachers and support staff have to stay at home.

***The NUT has issued guidance on these new rules. A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* Some schools across England are struggling to cope with the increased demands of providing **free school meals to all infants**, despite the government’s latest efforts to provide funding to upgrade inadequate facilities. The DfE has announced the maintained schools that had been successful in their bids for [extra funding for new facilities](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-infant-free-school-meals-capital-funding-allocations). But information gathered under freedom of information requests shows that parts of the country failed to receive any additional funding, while other schools are facing disruption from overstretched equipment or premises as a result of the universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) policy.
* Figures [released by the DfE](http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-12-17/219279/) show that the 4,400 academies in England held **cash reserves** of £2.47bn at the end of the last financial year. That is more than the remaining 18,700 local authority maintained schools put together, which held a combined £2.18bn.
* Nicky Morgan, has come under fire from lawyers who claim her latest guidance could result in more children being **expelled from school**. Just for Kids Law has challenged [Morgan’s proposals to lower the expulsion threshold](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jan/06/pupils-lower-threshold-school-exclusions). Under new statutory guidance, headteachers can remove a child from class if their conduct is deemed detrimental to the education or welfare of others in the class. The previous threshold required schools to establish that serious harm was being caused to others. Rachel Knowles, a solicitor at Just for Kids Law, said: “The previous guidance had a page of advice that emphasised that exclusion was a matter of last resort. That phrase has been removed from the new guidance. The DfE says it’s just a few clarifications but it’s totally and radically altering the test. I would expect that it will result in many more permanent exclusions.” The changes were introduced without consultation, it is claimed, prompting a judicial review
* **Muslim pupils** across Britain are suffering a backlash of bullying and abuse following the Charlie Hebdo massacre amid a broad rise in Islamophobia in schools. The sole UK charity monitoring anti-Muslim hate crime said it had recorded a “significant” increase in incidents in schools in the wake of the killings in Paris with both parents and teachers reporting verbal and physical attacks against Muslim students.
* Schools are being forced to train their receptionists and teaching assistants to act as **careers advisers** because of a dearth of qualified staff, MPs have been told. A MP said public service union Unison had undertaken research which showed that 83 per cent of schools no longer employed professional careers advisers or teachers. The role, he added, had been “picked up by people including, in many cases, teaching assistants and other support staff who are totally ill-equipped”.
* An epidemic of **self-harm** is blighting the lives of students across the country, with schools unable to offer assistance due to a shortage of support services, teaching unions have warned. NHS figures suggest a 20 per cent rise in hospital admissions in England Wales and Northern Ireland among 10 to 19-years-old with self-harm injuries.
* School trips have become **unaffordable for many parents**, as over a third admit that the cost of sending children on educational visits is too expensive. According to the survey, a third of parents also think that the cost of uniform is too high, while almost three quarters say there should be stronger regulations on how much schools are allowed to charge for the services they provide to pupils. Just over half of parents say that the cost of trips should be covered by schools, while a similar number say that parents should not be expected to pay for their child to take part in extra-curricular activities at school, including sport and music. It follows warnings from the Children’s Commission of Poverty in October that millions of families are struggling with the hidden costs of schooling. An inquiry carried out by the Commission suggested that parents face average annual bills of £800 per pupil, with the costs of uniforms varying greatly between state schools. According to the inquiry, costs ranged from £34 to more than £500, with an average cost to parents of £108 for primary school uniform.
* The Conservatives have refused to rule out **cutting the schools budget** after the general election according to private briefing notes which were photographed yesterday. Documents being held by William Hague during a press conference showed that Tory frontbenchers were told to dodge questions about whether the education budget would be cut. It raises the possibility of billions of pounds being slashed from the education budget
* Ofsted has been given the green light to take a closer look at the work of groups running chains of academies**.** But it will not be allowed to make judgments about whether a trust is effective or not. The Education Secretary has [written to Ofsted](http://schoolsweek.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Nicky_Morgan_letter_to_Ofsted.pdf) advising of a new process for **‘inspecting’ multi-academy trusts (MATs**). In a move which will be seen as simply a formalisation of the existing method used by Ofsted to inspect MATs, Ms Morgan wrote of her preference that Ofsted continue to batch-inspect multiple schools rather than the trust itself. However, she added that a letter should be sent to all trusts after the batch inspections and published online. The letter, she said, should include “performance of the academies which have not been inspected, so that the wider position across the MAT can be understood”.
* Twenty two academies have been handed £12.6 million in **emergency funding** since 2011/12 and the vast majority does not need to be paid back, a Freedom of Information request has revealed. The Education Funding Agency’s response to the FOI request showed that just £331,000 –from 2013/14 and 2014/15 – has to be repaid. The DfE said in a statement: “Deficit funding is decided on a case by case basis and is only provided in rare circumstances where schools are facing significant financial pressures. “It is only provided once a robust and affordable recovery plan is in place. This allows schools to focus on providing a high quality education, preparing children for life in modern Britain.” One senior school business manager questioned why some schools received non-repayable funding, while the DfE issued other schools with financial notices to improve.
* The DfE has released the **application forms submitted by free school founders** to secure the opening of their schools; they are heavily redacted
* The DfE has ruled out delays to the introduction of any other new GCSEs after it was announced the new **design and technology** qualification would not be taught until 2017.
* **Early years initial teaching training** is to be inspected for the first time by Ofsted from April.
* A pilot scheme allowing students to study for GCSE and A Level courses through **satellite teaching** is to be rolled out nationally at United Learning schools. The United Classroom initiative, believed to be the first programme of its kind in the country, by United Learning was trialled at two of its schools – Lambeth Academy and Surbiton High – as an after-school activity. A group of pupils studying GCSE astronomy at Surbiton with their teacher were joined by students from Lambeth in their own classroom using Google’s “Apps for Education” tools. Students from both schools were able to ask questions, collaborate on work and present to each other as if they were in the same room. Following the success of the pilot, United Learning is now rolling out the scheme across all the group’s schools from September with physics and economics A Level among the subjects included.
* Education secretary, Nicky Morgan, has today outlined a three-part [**“new deal for teachers**”](http://email.education.gov.uk/rsps/wlnk/c/642/r/2023998/e/748) in a message to colleagues. The “new deal”, outlined in an email released from the DfE outlines her determination to tackle workload, increase development opportunities for teachers, and establish an independent College of Teaching.
* The government will use the UK’s position in the international PISA tests taken by 15-year-olds as one of the ways to **judge the success of its extensive exam** **reforms**, the DfE has confirmed. They will also listen to the views of employers and universities
* Sir Michael Wilshaw admitted that as a headteacher he had applied **positive discrimination** when “two people…of equal merit” applied for jobs and he felt that he needed to “increase the number of teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds”.
* New **national standards for headteachers** have been issued

***A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* The DfE has announced that all **ICSEs** will only be included in performance tables only until [reformed GCSEs](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/reforming-qualifications-and-the-curriculum-to-better-prepare-pupils-for-life-after-school/supporting-pages/gcse-reform) in each subject are first examined and counted, and after that they will not count for performance tables. So maths and English won’t count in the 2017 tables and beyond, and the other IGSEs won’t count in the 2018 tables and beyond
* From 12 January 2015, schools, colleges and organisations can apply to a £3.5 million [**character education grant fund**](https://online.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/Common/View%20Notice.aspx?site=1000&lang=en&NoticeId=1716339)to support projects in character education.

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/character-education-apply-for-2015-grant-funding>

It is also possible to apply for **character awards**

See <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dfe-character-awards-application-window-now-open>

The DfE has also made £1 million available to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to build evidence and expand research into the most effective ways that **character can be taught**. Funding from the EEF is available to any not-for-profit organisation that provides well-evidenced interventions in character education to scale up and test their approaches. Applicants will be able to apply until 1 April.

* Funding for the **Early Years Pupil Premium** has been implemented in 7 local authorities from this week. The money will be distributed to early years providers delivering the funded entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds, who will receive up to £300 extra per year for each disadvantaged child who meets the eligibility criteria. The DfE will ask for feedback from the councils before the full £50 million EYPP is implemented throughout England in April 2015.
* The DfE has issued **subject content for AS and A-level:**
  + Music
  + PE
  + Dance

***These can found on the above website, Documents – Subject related documents – New A and AS levels***

* The DfE has issued **subject content for GCSE**:
  + Music
  + PE
  + Dance
  + Art and Design
  + Computer Science

***These can found on the above website, Documents – Subject related documents – New GCSES***

The plans for new music GCSEs and A-levels are being changed to ensure that pupils study a diverse range of works, after a campaign from musicians and academics. The DfE says it will now change the music GCSE to include “a new requirement for students to analyse unfamiliar music”. A revised definition of Western classical music has been included for both the new GCSE, AS- and A-levels with the date range extended from 1700-1900 to 1650-1910. Exam boards are also being given the option to include a “small amount” of classical music written outside of those dates. It has agreed to scrap suggested minimum lengths for performing and composing in the exams after fears were raised that minimum time periods could simply lead to students creating and performing works at a very slow pace.

 For the new PE GCSE, the government has decided that pupils will be assessed in three rather than two activities, including at least one team sport and one individual sport. The list of sports for GCSE, AS- and A-level PE has been expanded to include rugby sevens and indoor climbing.

* Full details on the **2015 assessment and reporting arrangements for KS2** can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara>
* The DfE has issued statutory guidance that local authorities must follow relating to **schools causing concern**.

***A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* The DfE has issued Information for schools on the **2015 Pupil Premium summer schools programme.**

***A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* The DfE has issued an updated **Governors’ Handbook**

***A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* The National Governors' Association (NGA) and the Wellcome Trust have launched a new [**Framework for Governance**](http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/1af9e9b3-e599-409a-8b19-e067c671b0ce/FINAL-Framework-for-Governance.pdf.aspx). It can be used by any school regardless of phase, type or governance structure. The framework sets out how governors can evaluate their own practice, how to set the strategic direction for a school and how to monitor progress.

***A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* The DfE is introducing **post-16** **retention measures** for 2013/14 and 2014/15 data. In addition, a new package of accountability measures for 16-19 providers will be published in 2017 (based on 2015/16 data), one of which will be a retention measure. In order to prepare for the transition to the new measure, the retention element of Qualification Success Rates (QSRs) will be produced in 2015, rather than the full QSRs for schools. This ‘interim’ retention measure will be provided to school and academy sixth forms and to Ofsted for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years.
* Ofsted has issued edition 1 of its **School Inspection Update**

***A copy is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* Senior exam board officials have joined the ASCL in calling for greater public debate about Ofqual’s proposal to introduce **stricter limits on rising GCSE grades**. ASCL has expressed concerns about the “comparable outcomes” approach, which Ofqual already uses to prevent grade inflation by pegging GCSE and A-level results to the performance of students in previous years. The watchdog is now considering a shift towards even greater reliance on historical statistics, rather than judgements of pupil work, when setting grade boundaries for the reformed GCSEs, which are due to be taught from next year. But ASCL has called for a system that “reflects students’ real achievement – not that of students in the past”. The current use of comparable outcomes had already unfairly penalised schools, she said, because Ofsted had not taken account of the clampdown on rising grades. Last month Sir Michael Wilshaw used GCSE results to argue that improvement in secondary schools had “stalled” .But ASCL say: “If it is measured in terms of outcomes, it has to stall. Comparable outcomes fixes grades where they have been in the past. “We believe that Ofsted is failing to recognise that overall attainment by 16-year-olds is effectively capped by the current and proposed GCSE awarding process. As student attainment is the critical factor in Ofsted judgements, it is no surprise that the proportion of schools graded good or better is relatively unchanged.” But Ofqual has already confirmed that grade descriptors – criteria that should be fulfilled for a student to reach a particular grade – will not be used at all in 2017, the first year that the new GCSEs are awarded. Their use beyond that date is also in doubt: an Ofqual consultation published last year says, “We will consider in due course whether in future such [grade] descriptions could have any role in awarding.”
* There is no evidence that academies and free schools, two central pillars of the coalition's school reforms, have had any effect on raising standards across the system, according to a cross-party panel of MPs. A report, published by the **Commons Education Select Committee**, says it is too early to know whether academies and free schools will be a “positive force for change”. The committee’s report states: “Academisation is not always successful, nor is it the only proven alternative for a struggling school. Both academies and state maintained schools have a role to play in system-wide improvement by looking outwards and accepting challenge in order to ensure high-quality education for all children.” MPs said they still had concerns about the general oversight of both academy sponsors and chains, and warned that the success of sponsored academies created under Labour did not necessarily translate to schools that have converted since 2010.  “Some chains, such as Harris, have proved very effective at raising attainment, while others achieve worse outcomes than comparable mainstream schools,” the report states. “What is clear is that the picture is highly variable across the country and, in the case of sponsored academies, across chains.” About 60 per cent of secondary schools are now academies, but just 13 per cent of primaries have converted. The committee goes on to warn: "There is at present no convincing evidence of the impact of academy status on attainment in primary schools. The DfE should commission such research as a matter of urgency." Committee chair and Conservative MP Graham Stuart said, "Nearly half of all academies are not part of a chain. By being 'stand-alone', these schools risk becoming isolated from others and as such as both less likely to contribute to others and less supported if they begin to fail. In future, Ofsted should require evidence of effective partnership with another institution before any school can be judged 'outstanding'."  The report also calls for the regulatory and funding roles of the Education Funding Agency to be split in a bid to increase transparency. The DfE must become more open about how academies are run, and give Ofsted full powers to inspect academy chains. It says the DfE must be clear to academy sponsors and local authorities exactly what is expected of them, and set firm rules for the selection of sponsors. “There needs to be greater scrutiny of the sponsors and the financial decisions. Regional Schools Commissioners need to be increased in number. “The role of local authorities needs to be reappraised and written down so they know what is expected of them and what their role is in the system.” The committee has called on the DfE to publish clear information setting out the process and criteria by which academy sponsors are authorised and funding agreements are reviewed. It also suggests the length of funding agreements should be reduced from seven to five years. Ofsted should also be given the powers needed to inspect academy chains and there should be protocols in place for dealing with larger ones that are failing. In the case of free schools, the committee recommends the DfE make clear how the competition is decided, that local authorities are told of any proposal to open a free school in their area and to monitor intake numbers.
* Three-quarters of trainee, student and newly qualified teachers have already considered **leaving the profession**, a survey reveals. Among almost 900 teachers embarking on their classroom careers who were questioned by the ATL teaching union, 73 per cent admitted having thought about quitting. Of these, three-quarters (76 per cent) said that high workload was the reason, while 26 per cent blamed the expectation to take part in activities outside school hours. Thirty per cent said they had considered quitting because of “teacher bashing” in the press and a lack of respect for the profession, while a quarter said challenging pupil behaviour had made them consider leaving. Over half (54 per cent) of the teachers surveyed said they did not think they would still be teaching in 10 years’ time; 24 per cent said they expected to leave within the next five years. Workload was also the most disliked aspect of the profession, cited to by 87 per cent of respondents.

The number of teachers quitting the classroom is at its highest for a decade, official figures reveal. DfE figures show that almost 50,000 teachers left the profession in the 12 months to November 2013 – the latest year for which figures are available – an increase of 25 per cent over four years. This represents around one in 12 full-time teachers and comes on top of figures showing the number of entrants to the professions is falling.

* **Functional skills qualifications** were introduced in 2010. Functional skills represent around 7 per cent of all regulated qualifications taken in England each year. In 2013/14, over one million were awarded, compared to 300,000 in 2010/11. Functional skills qualifications are available in English, mathematics and ‘information and communication technology’ from entry level to level 2

Ofqual has set out the improvements that awarding organisations are making to current functional skills qualifications, following its recent review. In particular, awarding organisations will be:

* improving the quality of assessments, to provide more real-life context and allow students to demonstrate a wider range of skills
* strengthening awarding processes and undertaking additional monitoring to give greater assurance that standards have been met
* working more closely with employers and other users to make sure that the qualifications meet their needs

Ofqual will review their progress in autumn this year. In the meantime it will set out guidance on question design and work with awarding organisations to make sure standards are set more consistently.

* Allegations that three Norfolk schools were **tipped off** about impending Ofsted inspections have been rejected by a lawyer in an independent review.
* A new survey of more than 1,000 heads suggests that lack of investment remains a pressing priority for hundreds of primary and secondary schools. A poll by [the Key](https://schoolleaders.thekeysupport.com/), an independent organisation that provides advice and support to school leaders and governors, found that [more than a third of heads felt their **schools weren’t fit for purpose**](http://key.sc/15CwpTQ). Almost six in 10 would like to improve or repair their buildings, and nearly half wanted to build extra classrooms. The research reveals the need is most acute in the south and south-west, where more than two-fifths of school leaders say their buildings are not good enough.
* The academic achievement of native English speakers does not suffer if they attend schools with a high proportion of pupils who speak a different first language, according to a new report. The research, released today by the [Education Endowment Foundation](http://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/), shows that the number of children who speak **English as an additional language** (EAL) has more than doubled since 1997, with 16.2 per cent of all pupils in England categorised as EAL in 2013, up from 7.6 per cent. More than one million EAL pupils now attend schools across the country, attracting an additional £243 million in funding.  Cash for pupils without English as a first language needs to be better targeted and schools should be held to greater account if it is not spent effectively the report says. The research published shows huge variation in the results achieved by students classified as English EAL. The report calls on local authorities to continue prioritising EAL funding and urged schools to target funding more effectively. They say schools should be held accountable for spending their resources in ways that reduce the attainment gap of pupils within the EAL category in a similar way to how they demonstrate Pupil Premium spending impacts on disadvantaged students. Their research shows on average EAL students catch up with their peers by the time they reach 16, but 10 percentage points fewer achieve a good level of development at the age of five compared to their peers.
* The number of secondary schools considered to be under-performing has doubled to more than 300 in the wake of a major overhaul of the exams system, official figures show. The statistics, show 330 state schools fell beneath the government's floor target this year, up from 154 last year, after failing to ensure that enough pupils gained five good GCSE grades and made sufficient progress, according to an analysis of **new league tables**.  The DfE insisted that the rise is down to two key reforms - a decision that only a teenager's first attempt at a GCSE would count in the annual performance tables, and a move to strip poor quality vocational qualifications out of the rankings. Dozens of schools, the vast majority of them in the independent sector, have seen their results plummet to zero because some combinations of English GCSEs and some IGCSEs do not count in the rankings this year. Ofsted said that while exam results are looked at when it decides which schools to inspect, falling below the floor targets would not automatically trigger a visit from inspectors. [Last summer's GCSE results showed a sharp drop in English grades](https://news.tes.co.uk/b/news/2014/08/21/gcse-results-heads-39-union-vows-to-investigate-drop-in-english-grades.aspx), with 61.7 per cent of entries scoring A\*-C, down 1.9 percentage points from last summer. This is believed to be the biggest drop in the qualification's history. Maths saw an opposite result, with 62.4 per cent of entries gaining an A\*-C grade, up 4.8 percentage points on 2013.Only one in three disadvantaged, (PP), students achieved five good GCSE passes, compared with more than 60% of their better-off peers and the gap widened this year. Today’s figures show that since 2010 the number of pupils entering:
* the EBacc has risen by 71% - 89,874 more pupils now enter the EBacccompared to 2010
* history or geography has risen by 31% - 84,550 more pupils now enter history or geography compared to 2010
* languages has risen by 21% - 49,858 more pupils now enter language subjects compared to 2010

School league tables have been condemned for being 'nonsense' and a 'broken system' in the wake of these results that have pushed hundreds of schools below the government's floor target. ASCL claimed that the DfE tables offered a “skewed” picture of school performance while the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), representing elite independent schools, said they had become a “nonsense”.

* Figures show the number of **A- level entries** in so-called facilitating subjects has risen by more than 20,000 since 2009 - 2010 to 407,674. These are the courses that Russell Group universities tell students open doors to more degrees. The statistics also show a higher proportion of pupils are taking each of the science and maths subjects than in 2009 - 2010. Since 2009 -2010, the number of maths exam entries has risen by more than 9,000 to 79,036.

The figures also showed:

* + maths was the most popular A level of all, accounting for 10.6% of all entries - this is the highest percentage since records began in 1996
  + the number of girls taking physics has risen from 5,689 in 2009 to 2010 to 6,423 in 2013 to 2014
  + the number of girls taking maths has risen by 7.3% since 2009 to 2010, in biology entries have risen by 8.9%, and in chemistry they were up 16.2%
  + since 2009 to 2010 the proportion of A level entries in tough ‘facilitating’ subjects has gone from 50.3% to 54.9%
* Sean Harford, Ofsted’s national director for schools policy, has criticised some schools for grouping disadvantaged children together on so-**called “pupil premium tables”** in classrooms. Ofsted added later that Mr Harford had heard about the practice “anecdotally” and mentioned it as an example of bad practice. “There is no evidence it is prevalent in schools at the moment,” the spokesman said.
* Thousands more students are **staying in education or going on to employment or** **training**, according to figures. The data shows that between October 2012 to March 2013 91% of pupils continued down 1 of these 3 routes after key stage 4 (normally 16 years old), rising from 89% the previous year - a total of 6,500 pupils. The figures also show that more than 1,600 institutions do not have any sixth-formers going on to the universities of Oxford or Cambridge, according to these statistics. However, the analysis suggests that the vast majority of schools and colleges teaching 16- to 18-year-olds saw at least some of their students go on to higher education. At almost 100 schools and colleges, at least 80 per cent of students won a university place. But the data also suggest that around 185 did not have any pupils go on to a ‘top-third’ university, those asking for the highest entry grades. Around 335 had no students go to a Russell Group university, which are considered as being among the best in the country. According to a separate analysis by the DfE, just under two-thirds of state schools and colleges (63 per cent) had no sixth-formers go on to attend Oxbridge, while 13 per cent of those in the state sector had no students going to Russell Group universities. Overall, around seven in 10 state-educated young people were in education, employment or training the year after taking their A-levels or equivalent qualifications.  The figures also show that just under half of students from state-funded schools and colleges went to university, down from 53 per cent the year before.

***A copy of the summary document of student destinations 2012-2103 is available on the above website, Documents –Latest documents***

* **The DfE** lacks basic knowledge about how schools operate and is unable to measure how effective its interventions are in helping troubled schools, according to a critical report published by a parliamentary watchdog. [Margaret Hodge](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/margaret-hodge), chair of the House of Commons’ public accounts committee, said the report on school oversight and intervention revealed a rudderless department lacking effective procedures or insight. “The DfE has focused on increasing schools’ autonomy but it has done so without a proper strategy for overseeing the system. Its light touch approach means that problems in some schools can go undetected until serious damage has been done,” Hodge said. “Confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the department, the Education Funding Agency, local authorities and academy sponsors has allowed some schools to fall through gaps in the system, meaning failure can go unnoticed.” The report also asks for a proper strategy from the DfE to help prevent unforeseen school scandals such as the “Trojan horse” affair in Birmingham. There is also a concern that the DfE does not know enough about the effectiveness of the sponsors when they are brought in to improve schools as part of the academies programme. It was noted the DfE had “paused the growth of 18 sponsors because of concerns about performance and they were responsible for the education of almost 100,000 children.” The committee recommends the DfE obtain independent judgments of sponsor effectiveness and use these to determine which sponsors can grow or intervene in troubled schools. The other recommendations are for the DfE to clarify its role and that of Regional Schools Commissioners and local authorities and how they will work together to identify failure at an early stage. It suggests carrying out an audit of school governors and ensure appropriate training, saying “the failure to identify problems with governors at some Birmingham schools highlights just one risk of not knowing enough about governors”. Ms Hodge said worryingly some local authorities did not understand their safeguarding duties towards academy pupils and it was recommended these were outlined in a document.
* There is a new initiative backed by £5 million of government funding to boost the quality of **early years education**. It has been awarded to more than 60 teaching schools across the country who will partner up with local nurseries to drive up standards and share best practice.
* The DfE has issued the new SEND code of practice valid from April 1 2015

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**Tony Stephens**