

Written evidence submitted by Pearson

Submission

Introduction

Pearson is the world's learning company providing content, assessment and digital services to learners, educational institutions, employers, governments, individuals, and partners globally. We have extensive experience of the UK education and skills system and as a learning company and awarding organisation provide a broad range of products and services to primary and secondary schools, further education providers, work-based learning providers, higher education institutions, employers, and individuals. We work with subject and professional experts to design and provide general qualifications and work closely with business and employers to create career-focussed qualifications and learning such as BTECs, Higher Nationals, apprenticeships, and short courses. We are also a FTSE 100 company with our own successful apprenticeship scheme.

This submission covers the aspects of our UK business relevant to this Inquiry namely, general education, and vocational education including BTECs, apprenticeships and higher vocational education. We have focussed our response on the topics where we can most usefully comment.

Summary

We welcome the decisions made in respect of awarding grades for both general and vocational qualifications and believe it is the best way to deliver the fairest results possible, under the circumstances. We also welcome Ofqual's willingness to apply the contingencies across the different types of qualification, helping to mitigate any disadvantage either might encounter. We are now working to ensure understanding around the process for summer 2020 results and working towards autumn and summer 2021 series.

It has been vital to ensure the institutions we work with were clear about what was required of them and the help available. We have provided support, advice and guidance to institutions. It is clear that a greater use of digital resources has a place in education and that the successful use of online learning requires specific expertise. We continue to share our knowledge with teachers to help them utilise digital tools.

The Chancellor's 'Plan for Jobs' provides welcome support for progression, via apprenticeships and traineeships, and we believe this could be further complemented by support for flexible provision for adults to help them back into work.

It has been critical to support institutions throughout this period to help them provide remote learning to support continued progression. Pearson has made a range of digital courses and resources freely available to help the institutions we work with continue to provide consistent support for all learners at this time (and their parents where relevant).

The current national emergency has highlighted the importance of online materials and their reach beyond the classroom or lecture theatre. There is clearly an appetite for this digital content, but digital capabilities and coverage are not uniform – at an institution level and family level. More needs to be done to ensure that all learners can access content and digital resources. A blended approach, using digital and print, can help identify and fill gaps in learning caused by the disruption.

In addition, all stakeholders involved in involved would benefit from a lessons learned review to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency

Recommendations

We make eight recommendations under the following sections of the report to support the progression to the next stage of employment, to improve digital capabilities and resilience, and to learn lessons to inform contingency planning.

Progression to the next stage of education or employment

- 1 Allow adult further education and work-based learners to access **maintenance support**.
- 2 Open up opportunities to help employers and individuals access **flexible training** to meet regional and key sector shortages and help people back into work.
- 3 To support **SMEs**, as well as the employer incentive, Government should consider removing the 5% investment requirement for SMEs. All levy-paying employers should also be encouraged to utilise the transfer of funds policy.
- 4 Apprenticeships for **16-19-year-olds** should be fully funded by government.
- 5 A **regional and sectoral approach** to apprenticeships should be explored.

Improving digital capabilities and resilience

- 6 Government should work with the wider sector (including tech and internet companies, content providers, and those with specific expertise in digital learning) to find innovative ways that **will ensure learners are able to access content**.
- 7 Institutions should be further **encouraged and supported to embed and build capacity and skills in online and blended learning** to identify and fill any gaps in learning caused by the disruption, and to make better use of digital resources to encourage new effective ways of thinking and delivery. This would create resilience and sustainability within the system.

Lessons learned review

- 8 In time, the DfE should conduct a **comprehensive lessons learned review** to inform future contingency planning.

Question responses

1. The effect of cancelling formal exams, including the fairness of qualifications awarded and pupils' progression to the next stage of education or employment

1.1 Mitigating the impact of cancelling formal exams/internal assessments to ensure fairness and progression

Since the Secretary of State announced that the summer exam series would not take place, we have been working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE), Ofqual and the other awarding organisations (AOs) to define the detail of how awarding will work. Pearson's overriding aim, as with any exam series, is to make sure that every learner receives a grade or award that reflects their knowledge and understanding of the subject they have studied.

This situation has required an unprecedented approach. The fairest and most reliable thing would be for students to have been able to take their examinations, but this was not feasible. The method that was devised and agreed, following consultation, is the best way to deliver the fairest results possible, under the circumstances. However, we recognise the approach does have limitations and the need for greater understanding. We therefore welcomed this Committee's report, *Getting the grades they've earned: Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades*, published 11 July.

We have welcomed Ofqual's willingness to apply extraordinary contingencies (ERF) to ensure that all learners, whether they are undertaking general qualification (GCSEs or A levels) or vocational qualifications (such as BTEC) to ensure they are not disadvantaged. However, AOs (via JCQ) have raised with Ofqual that all General Conditions of Recognition continue to remain alongside the ERF and could create confusion.

Awarding bodies are where the technical expertise and system capacity exists, and we have deployed this to work with Ofqual to ensure that learners can progress. We continue to work with the regulator, sharing our plans and meeting all regulatory principles.

Three different approaches to qualifications are in place depending on the nature of the qualifications: calculated; adapted; or delayed.

Calculated

An agreed calculated awarding process, common to all exam boards, is in place for general qualifications. This has required intuitions to provide centre assessed grades, and learner rank ordering.

Many vocational and technical qualifications, particularly our suite of BTEC qualifications at level 3, will also be awarded using this process. Some vocational qualifications are assessed via internal assessment which has meant institutions were able to provide grades for already completed internally assessed units to be used as part of the overall calculation. In order to ensure fairness to all learners however, we were clear that for certain qualifications, we did not expect any assessments to take place after lockdown.

Whilst vocational qualifications have similarities across exam boards there are also some significant differences. This meant that a one-size fits all approach would not have resulted in fair outcomes for learners. So, whilst awarding organisations have worked together to ensure a consistent approach across qualifications where relevant, we have agreed with Ofqual a specific approach to the awarding of our BTEC qualifications.

Awarding bodies have used a statistical model, developed by Ofqual, considering historical data and the national picture, as well as the data from institutions, to issue final grades. The question arose as to whether this mathematical model could consider the impact of positive changes to pedagogical approaches and/or leadership. Ofqual recognised it would be desirable to reflect trajectories when issuing calculated grades, however as a result of consultation it was decided that this would not be taken into consideration.

Private candidates

We have worked closely with institutions to ensure, as far as possible, that private candidates are awarded a grade this summer. Where institutions have been unable to provide grades and rank orders, we have sometimes been able to transfer the learner to another institution that was able to validate the evidence of the learner's level of achievement for the purpose of submitting a grade and rank order information. This ensures those learners will not be disadvantaged and will be supported to progress to the next stage of their studies or into employment.

Adapted

It has not been possible to issue calculated results for some vocational and technical qualifications because the results could not be awarded reliably or safely. Where this is the case, we have worked to adapt the assessments to ensure learners can complete and progress.

Apprenticeships

Pearson is a long-established provider of apprenticeships and since the introduction of standards, we have developed our offer to become one of the largest providers of end-point assessments (EPAs).

Our focus has been on adapting assessments to support the continuation of EPA (wherever possible). We welcome the swift work the DfE and the ESFA undertook with IFATE and Ofqual to develop and implement flexibilities to allow for reliable and valid assessment in order to support apprentices to achieve and progress. We have worked closely with IFATE and the External Quality Assurance Organisation (EQAOs) on a standard-by-standard basis. This has involved agreeing arrangements for remote assessments and simulated environments, and modifications to assessment methods which do not compromise quality or the intention of the assessment.

As a result of this, we have continued to serve those sectors operating during the current situation and managed increased demand where it exists, for example, in healthcare and management. In addition, the employers we work with have been flexible and innovative in the way they support their apprentices for their EPA and have also used this time to accelerate their digital transformation plans.

Higher education qualifications

BTEC Higher Nationals (HNs) have no formal exams, only internally set assessments. In the main, the mitigation for these qualifications has been to adapt assessments as this was most effective approach to recognising learners' achievement in a fair and robust manner.

Delayed

Where it is not possible to calculate qualifications grades and assessments cannot be adapted, assessments will be delayed until it is safe to continue. Around 80 of our qualification assessments have been delayed and we will continue to review whether arrangements can be made for adapted assessment should the situation continue to prevent these learners achieving and progressing.

Future considerations – 2020 & 2021

It is likely that centre assessed grades will be adjusted to ensure that qualification standards are maintained and that the certificates learners achieve are valid. There will be expectations from learners (and parents in some cases) that the grade initially provided by the teacher, will be the same as the formal and final awarded grade. We will communicate clearly to explain why this may not be the case, and to explain the process behind the awarding of learners' grades. The process should be transparent to all learners, and where relevant, their parents. And it is important that we have an appeals process in place and that students have the ability to take exams in the autumn, should they wish.

We continue to support learners to ensure they are ready for assessments and particularly for exams in the autumn of 2020 and summer of 2021 and to ensure that any assessments set are fair and valid. Those learners who wish to sit exams this autumn will be able to do so, however the threat that this series could be disrupted remains.

In respect of the 2021 series, we are participating in Ofqual's consultation process, but are aware of the need for clarity ahead of a return to teaching by institutions in September. In agreeing an approach for exams in 2021, we will work closely with Ofqual to understand and mitigate the impact of the lockdown on learners studying towards assessments and exams.

1.2 Supporting schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, employers and higher education institutions to ensure fairness and progression

It has been vital, given the mitigations we have had to put into place to ensure the institutions we work were clear about what was required of them and the support available. We continuously provided support, advice and guidance to institutions in a number of ways.

- Targeted regular newsletters and briefings about the timelines and processes and all the support and latest information on the centre assessed grades, rank order and clear instructions as to what institutions had to complete. These included resources such as infographics and video guidance.
- Further guidance on characteristics within a grade to support rank ordering for those with large cohorts.
- Guidance on the adapted assessment approach for competency qualifications and EPA for apprentices.
- An ‘Ask the Expert’ service staffed by a team of expert examiners.
- Regular meetings with the teacher associations to identify and address the concerns of their members and to work with them to support schools, colleges and work-based learning providers.
- Regular meetings with heads of admissions of UK universities and UCAS to keep them informed of arrangements for this summer to support learners applying to university. This will continue through confirmation and clearing.

1.3 Progression to the next stage of education or employment

Supporting skills and jobs

As ministers begin to prepare for a post-lockdown economic recovery, they should consider how to support people affected by unemployment due to the COVID situation, and particularly those disproportionately affected. We welcome the package of initiatives announced in Plan for Jobs by Treasury. This should help boost Apprenticeships and Traineeships and younger learners to stay in education to develop their skills for progression into further learning and work. The initiatives that focus on job centres and work coaches will also help many develop the skills they need to get back into employment.

The country faces skills shortages in key sectors and, in terms of productivity, the UK comes bottom of the G7. However, it has been consistently shown that those with the most skilled workforces achieve the greatest success over the long-term. A highly skilled and adaptable workforce is key for our economic recovery and will play a vital role in supporting employers and our economic recovery post COVID-19.

We look forward to understanding the impact of these initiatives, however, we believe more should take more action to ensure we support individuals and the economy to recover and rebuild.

Many young people face significant barriers to staying on in education after 18. Whilst many can access funding or loan funding to support their study, they have no access to maintenance support if they are not studying in higher education and cannot afford to study the work-related further education courses that may best support them in the future.

Recommendation 1: Allow adult further education and work-based learners access to **maintenance support**.

As part of Pearson’s response to COVID-19, we have developed UK Learns - a new online learning platform designed to open up employment opportunities for UK workers affected by COVID-19. The platform hosts hundreds of mainly short course programmes selected in consultation with employers and content partners. It complements our Learning Hub digital learning platform. We would welcome sustainable funding options from across central and devolved Government to enable individuals to access funding for flexible training opportunities to support their reskilling and help them back in to work.

Recommendation 2: Open up opportunities to help employers and individuals access **flexible training** to meet regional and key sector shortages and help people back into work.

2. Support for pupils and families during closures, including the consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning, and the effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses

2.1 Consistency of messaging from schools and further and higher education providers on remote learning

Online resources

Pearson offers a range of digital courses and resources. During the pandemic we have made these resources available for free to help the institutions we work with continue to provide consistent support for all learners at this time (and their parents where relevant). They include:

- Resources required to help teachers and tutors in primary and secondary schools, further education colleges, employers, and higher education institutions deliver their curriculum online. This includes digital text books and formative assessments.
- The Maths Factor – an online platform designed for children aged 4-12 years to build their confidence in maths, matched to the National Curriculum.
- The Learning Hub - a digital learning platform designed to deliver an engaging, accessible, interactive and personalised learning experience for learners, educators and employers.
- We have also developed the UK Learns platform in response to the impact of COVID-19 – this online platform provides access to high quality, mainly short courses, across a breadth of industry sectors, to support Individuals back into work.
- We have provided training, support and best practice on online delivery for teachers and tutors.

The reaction to our provision of materials has been positive and take up has been significant. This reflects a willingness to engage with and utilise online learning materials for learners of all ages to help them progress to the next stage of their education, or into employment.

Given the proliferation of online resources and providers and the need for consistency, we welcomed the DfE's guidance on resources for online learning in schools and colleges, and the National Careers Service Toolkit, both of which signpost to these online resources from Pearson to support access to high quality materials.

Disadvantaged learners

We share the concerns of the Committee that learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds will be disadvantaged by this current situation because they do not have the resources, time and support to study in their home environment. Across Pearson we are committed to creating inclusive and accessible digital content. Our global editorial policy and accessibility policy pervades everything we do, and we believe it should be a requirement for all organisations in the sector to follow similar guidelines.

The impact on SEND students, many of whom may find the lack of structure and additional support offered by the classroom setting more challenging, is likely to be disproportionately negative. We have offered a number of digital resources that allow institutions to assess, educate and support young people remotely while keeping them engaged during these challenging times.

2.2 The effect on apprenticeships and other workplace-based education courses

Pearson works to provide and support apprenticeships in three ways. We are a long-established provider of apprenticeships and since the introduction of standards, we have developed our offer to become one of the largest providers of end-point assessments (EPAs). We have covered our work as an end-point assessment organisation in Section 1.1.

We also have a provider arm and work with employers, the Armed Forces in particular, to deliver apprenticeships. We are also a levy payer and run our own very successful apprenticeship scheme.

Our **delivery arm** has had to make alternative arrangements for apprenticeships delivery.

- We have moved to digital remote delivery for staff and 4500 apprentices, many of whom were directly deployed in support of COVID-19 operations or dispersed outside their normal place of work.

As a **levy-paying employer** we have been unable to recruit apprentices at the numbers we would usually expect to, to conduct effective work with schools as we would normally and have faced challenges delivering to our apprentices.

- However, our partner providers have been able to adjust their delivery models and are all offering digital remote delivery. This has not only meant that we are able to start apprentices on a roll-on, roll-off basis but also a more effective solution as providers are offering workshops for apprentices across many companies and geographical areas rather than delivering to minimum group sizes.
- We have also engaged with SMEs to support them through the transfer of funds policy whereby levy-paying employers can transfer a maximum amount of 25% of their levy and have pledged £30-35K to the London LPPN Reskilling for Recovering programme.

Our flexible approach to helping employers and apprentices and continuing to support the economy and upskilling has only been possible due to the flexibilities introduced by IFATE and the DfE/ESFA to the EPA delivery model and the funding. However, even with these flexibilities, far fewer apprentices are completing for various reasons, including for example, employers choosing not to utilise the flexibilities, and lack of accessibility to equipment or environment needed for high quality assessment to occur.

We know that rising unemployment will lead to apprentice redundancies and a shortage of new places. We have for example, seen a 30% downturn in demand for EPAs and our partner employers and providers are reporting that no new recruitment of apprentices will be take place in the remainder of 2020. Younger apprentices will be particularly affected. They are more likely to be made redundant and are more likely to work in the entry level jobs hit most by the crisis. For example, in one of our partner colleges only 7% of under 18-year-old apprentices remain in employment. SMEs will be particularly affected by the downturn and need further support. Apprenticeships also provide professional pathways for young people which will be more crucial than ever given the economic upheaval brought by COVID-19 and to avoid the short and long-term costs of unemployment.

Recommendation 3: To support SMEs, as well as the employer incentive, Government should consider removing the 5% investment requirement for SMEs. All levy-paying employers should also be encouraged to utilise the transfer of funds policy.

Recommendation 4: Apprenticeships for **16-19-year-olds** should be fully funded by government. This is in line with the recommendation from the February 2020 report of the Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group in response to the pre-COVID trend of a reduction in the proportion of apprenticeships being delivered to young people since the introduction of the levy, the new funding model, and the removal of a number of level 2 apprenticeships.

Recommendation 5: A **regional and sectoral approach** to apprenticeships should be explored. Before the outbreak of COVID-19 the 2020 report by the Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group recommended that city regions and mayors, working closely with employers and other stakeholders, could usefully direct investment in apprenticeships where it is needed most to support regional sector skills shortages. Local adaptation now plays an even more important role if we are to tackle shortages and prosperity in different areas.

3. Contingency planning to ensure the resilience of the sector in case of any future national emergency

3.1 Improving digital capabilities and resilience

The current national emergency has highlighted the importance of online materials and their reach beyond the classroom or lecture theatre. There is clearly an appetite for and willingness to utilise this digital content.

Digital capabilities and coverage are not uniform – be it at an institution level or family level. We welcomed the Secretary of State’s announcement (19 April) about the provision of IT equipment, including connectivity, to disadvantaged learners to improve accessibility to online learning. However, this should not be an isolated event.

Recommendation 6: Government should work with the wider sector including tech and internet companies, content providers, and those with specific expertise in digital learning) to find innovative ways that will **ensure learners are able to access content**. This will have wider benefits and should not be seen simply as a response to the pandemic.

The provision of equipment by itself, will not achieve this aim. The issue of capabilities is not confined to the ability of people to be able to access content, but also includes the capability of institutions to incorporate technology into the way they work, to successfully deliver online content, and to use technology to engage and drive understanding and progression – i.e. digital resilience. We welcome the government’s 2019 Digital Resilience Framework - a framework and tool for organisations, communities and groups to help people build resilience in their digital life – however, we know that institutions are in different states of readiness to move to remote learning and we would urge the government to consider how it might accelerate opportunities for remote learning and assessment adoption through possible funding and inspection methods.

The current situation has shown that that greater use of digital teaching and learning resources has a place in the education system, but that it is more challenging than simply putting everything on Zoom or Teams. The delivery of successful online learning requires the specific expertise and the value of providers, who can provide the pedagogy and the expertise to sequence, consolidate and reinforce learning should not be under-estimated.

Recommendation 7: Institutions should be further **encouraged and supported to embed and build capacity and skills in online and blended learning** to identify and fill any gaps in learning caused by the disruption, and to make better use of digital resources to encourage new effective ways of thinking and delivery. This would create resilience and sustainability within the system.

Supporting blended sets of structured print and digital resources, assessments and CPD can help ensure learning gaps are clearly identified. Then a structured and sequenced, best-practice approach to catch-up and on-going teaching can be delivered. This would improve upon the current ad-hoc approach in many institutions.

Practitioners must be confident in their abilities to deliver learning using virtual tools. There is scope for a sector wide CPD/qualification in online delivery. They should also be encouraged and supported to build capacity for remote assessment, including online examinations and remote proctoring.

We should embrace this opportunity to devise a coherent strategy to close the well documented digital divide.

3.2 Lessons learned review

Recommendation 8: In time, the DfE should conduct a **comprehensive lessons learned review** to inform future contingency planning. Areas of focus should include roles and responsibilities; optimising ways of working across government and partner bodies (including AOs); and channels of communication across DfE, the Secretary of State, Ofqual, JCQ, FAB and AOs to ensure clarity of communication to all education institutions.

July 2020