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The SCHOOLS NorthEast Weekly Update goes out to every Head Teacher in the North East every Tuesday, but if anybody else in your school or LA would like to receive the Update, please send their name and email address to r.clegg@schoolsnortheast.com.

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Focus on...qualifications and exams

Last week, qualifications and exam regulator Ofqual released their corporate plan outlining planned changes to exams in England. The proposed reforms follow well-publicised problems regarding marking, consistency, exam providers and alleged grade inflation in recent years.

The Government's 'The Importance of Teaching' White Paper gave the independent regulator the task of making sure that exam standards in this country match the highest standards overseas and Ofqual's Corporate Plan identifies the need to restore public confidence in the exam system.

To achieve this Ofqual plans to conduct a series of reviews into:

- the comparative demand and outcomes of key GCSEs and A level specifications;
- examination marking;
- the approach to appeals; and
- the way in which results are graded.

They also plan to make recommendations on comparability across subjects and awarding organisations, as well as improving the regulation and monitoring of qualifications that compete with GCSEs and A levels.

The Corporate Plan outlines specific changes to be introduced for each type of exam.

For GCSEs:

- From 2012, examinations will take place at the end of the course, rather than at the end of each module;
- GCSEs in English literature, geography, history and religious studies will include marks for the accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar from September 2012;
- Specifications in geography, history and English literature and assessment in mathematics will be changed to ensure the courses cover a broad enough curriculum;

- An evaluation will be conducted as to how to guarantee good literacy or numeracy skills for those gaining grade C in GCSE English, GCSE English language and GCSE mathematics;
- The usefulness of controlled assessment will be reviewed;
- The grading structure will be reviewed to decide whether it should continue to stretch from A* to G;
- Brand guidelines will be developed with the aim of reducing the number and range of GCSE subjects and courses; and
- GCSE's will be benchmarked against similar qualifications in other countries.

For A levels, Ofqual plans to:

- consider the range of qualifications, in particular in mathematics;
- consult on changes to the structure and assessment of A levels; and
- implement new ways of involving higher education in determining A level content.
- And following the Wolf Review, Ofqual plans to address Vocational qualifications by:
 - reviewing the Functional Skills qualifications;
 - reviewing the operation and usefulness of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF); and
 - reviewing and comparing standards in relevant areas of vocational qualifications, in particular those included in performance tables.

In addition, the watchdog will review Sats tests in English and Maths for 11-year-olds to make them comparable with exams sat by pupils in other countries.

Ofqual also hopes to reduce the temptation to 'teach to the test' which it states "can lead to good results at the cost of true understanding", by addressing the predictability of examinations, the supply of information to schools, colleges and teachers on the style and nature of particular examinations and limiting the types of seminars that exam boards can run. The regulator will also review the cost of all qualifications after schools spent £330m on exams last year, more than doubling the cost in just eight years,

The plans have been met with mixed reactions from education commentators. However in an article in The Journal, Dr Bernard Trafford, Headmaster at the Royal Grammar School in Newcastle, Beccy Earnshaw, Director of SCHOOLS NorthEast and spokespeople from the NUT and ASCL all agreed on the importance of school leaders and teachers being involved in all stages of the design and implementation of any changes. Mr Trafford said "I'm not against the idea of an overhaul, but I do pray that schools and teachers are consulted".

Ofqual's report comes as four examiners have had their contracts terminated and 78 others have been ordered to improve their performance after mistakes were made in calculating pupils' scores in GCSE and A-level papers from last summer.

The exam board OCR has apologised for marking errors that affected GCSE and A-level grades but exams regulator Ofqual said it could not be certain that all candidates had the grades they deserved.

- [Ofqual corporate plan](#) (Ofqual)
- [GCSE grading system faces biggest overhaul in 25 years](#) (Telegraph)
- [Overhaul of GCSE results could mean fewer grades](#) (BBC News)
- [A-levels 'could become university entrance exams'](#) (BBC News)
- [Examiners axed after marking mistakes](#) (Guardian News)
- [Making the grade](#) (Journal article)

Follow up from last week's focus on...pupil premium and social mobility

Following last week's 'Focus On the latest developments on the Pupil Premium', Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has made further announcements on measures to improve social mobility, including the introduction of a 'student premium'. The aim of the 'student premium' will be to guarantee financial help to any secondary school child on free school meals who passes the [English baccalaureate](#) and secures an offer of a place at university. Reports suggest that the plan is for students to know at least two years before applying to university that money would be available so long as they attain certain grades, and the money could come in the form of a fee waiver or a bursary.

At a conference on social mobility at the Sutton Trust yesterday, Labour leader Ed Miliband called on the Government to make the quality and perception of vocational education one of the central objectives of the current curriculum review, arguing that the debate about social mobility has focussed too much just on University education. "We need to ensure vocational education is seen as just as much of a gold standard as academic education," said Miliband, "And that there are good opportunities to switch between the two".

In a blog in the Guardian, Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation, set out the changes he thinks need to be made to improve the UK's record on social mobility, including a focus on teachers not school structures, increased public spending on universities to reduce student fees, and the introduction of means-tested fees to leading independent day schools.

Nick Clegg will today unveil plans for a new set of indicators to measure the impact of Government policies designed to improve social mobility including tracking and comparing the exam results of state and private pupils. New research has revealed that the gap in results between different school types is wider in Britain than almost any other developed country.

- [Clegg condemns divide in schools as 'corrosive'](#) (Independent)
- [Student premium to guarantee help for children on free school meals](#) (Telegraph)
- [Nick Clegg proposes student premium to help poorest entering university](#) (Guardian)
- [Ed Miliband demands end to 'snobbery' over vocational courses](#) (Guardian)
- [Ed Miliband speech on Social Mobility to the Sutton Trust](#) (Labour website)
- [We've created a society for non-doms, but not for children in our schools](#) (Guardian)
- [Private School Pupils 'Three Times More Likely' To Achieve Top A Levels Than State School Students](#) (Huffington Post)

Local news by area

Darlington

- [Norton teen secures place at Royal Academy of Dramatic Art](#) (Gazette Live)

Hartlepool

- [Checkmate for talented youngsters](#) (Hartlepool Mail)

Middlesbrough

- [Popularity of Primary Schools across Teesside + MAP](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Teesside High School pupil clinches spot at top drama school](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Anouska hails inspirational Ormesby School teachers](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Teesside kids get on their marks for Tesco Great School Run + GALLERY](#) (Gazette Live)

North Tyneside

- [Academy status joy for college sport staff](#) (News Guardian)

Northumberland

- [Northumberland pupils join big dance for Olympics](#) (Journal)
- [Pupils take part in UK's biggest fun run](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- [Pupil input wanted for save water campaign](#) (Berwick Advertiser)
- ['Good' Ofsted report delights headteacher](#) (Hexam Courant)
- [Jubilee appeal](#) (Hexam Courant)
- [Pupils are branching out](#) (Hexam Courant)
- [Bid to tackle school run chaos](#) (Hexam Courant)
- [Fumes fears for kids](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Pupils' work on big screen](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Lucky pupils get a sneak preview of their new school](#) (Morpeth Herald)
- [Pupils in court again](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [MP bids to speed up decision over high school](#) (Northumberland Gazette)
- [Pupils given a thrill as F1 makes pit stop at school](#) (Northumberland Gazette)

South Tyneside

- [Nursery looks to be growing places](#) (The Shields Gazette)
- [Children give a helping hand to Africa](#) (The Shields Gazette)
- [Stage is set for tribute to hero](#) (The Shields Gazette)

Stockton

- [Drawing a line under North Shore Academy's past](#) (Gazette Live)
- [Stockton school reunion to be held in memory of former pupil](#) (Gazette Live)

Sunderland

- [Sunderland school launches buy-a-brick appeal to pay for improvement work](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Sunderland graduates get a hand up onto the career ladder as 150 internships announced](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Special needs shake-up gets mixed reaction in Sunderland](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils are wild about wetland](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils step out to pitch business ideas](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Pupils receive letter from the Queen after inviting her to jubilee party](#) (Sunderland Echo)
- [Children's cooking competition part of food festival](#) (Sunderland Echo)

Redcar

- [Gory make-up skills inspire Freebrough Academy pupils' fundraising film](#) (Gazette Live)

Regional

- [Tyneside headteachers hold firm over special needs](#) (Chronicle Live)
- [North East pupils join in world record dance effort](#) (Chronicle Live)

Top national education news

Ofsted warns over early entry to maths GCSE

In a major report by Ofsted, they warn that too many schools are entering pupils for maths GCSE early. This is preventing too many able pupils from fulfilling their potential, says chief inspector Sir

Michael Wilshaw. The report also says maths exams have become less demanding and that teaching standards vary unacceptably.

[Ofsted warns over early entry to maths GCSE](#) (BBC News)

Schools aren't fit for pupils to learn in

A survey exclusively conducted for the Observer revealed that 4 in 10 Head Teachers believe their school buildings are unfit for purpose.

The Key, a national education support service, asked state school Heads and Business Managers whether their buildings were fit for purpose – 260 responded that they weren't. Some 49% of secondary schools said their buildings were not fit for purpose, as did 33% of those from primaries.

[Schools aren't fit for pupils to learn in, warn four in 10 headteachers](#) (Guardian)

School records 'too crude for super-diverse UK'

Schools should keep detailed records of the languages spoken by ethnic minority pupils according to a report from London Metropolitan University. It is not enough to simply record pupils' ethnicity as this is "too imprecise a measure," researchers say.

[School records 'too crude for super-diverse UK'](#) (BBC News)

Resources and Opportunities

Visit the SCHOOS NorthEast Marketplace

If you're looking for goods and services for your school then why not visit the SCHOOLS NorthEast Marketplace? The Market Place contains the profiles of our Commercial Supporters assisting you in finding goods and services for your school. Browse by category from School Improvement to Extra Curricula, you'll find something to suit your needs. Go to www.schoolsnortheast.com/marketplace

Get the most from IT - free taster subscription from JISC Advance for two lucky schools

If your school would like to know more about how to optimise classroom technologies to improve learning and teaching, or are interested in how to create dynamic learning resources, please put your school forward to win a free taster subscription to [JISC Advance](#). In partnership with JISC RSC Northern, the free taster subscription will run from June 2012 to October 2012 and will include 10 hours of individualised support.

To apply simply send your contact details to cam.swift@sunderland.ac.uk by **Friday 1 June** and winners will be randomly selected and announced shortly after.

Assist in trialling a chemistry test

A research associate from Durham University require assistance in trialling a chemistry test and need students from local schools to trial the test. The test is on paper and contains 70 questions for which the answer is 'true' or 'false.' Preliminary trials indicate the time for completion is between 20 and 40 minutes.

Any schools that are interested should contact peter.clark@cem.dur.ac.uk for more information or to get involved.

Sign up to a free website to find services for your school!

Schools Need Me is a free website for North East schools. The website (www.schoolsneedme.co.uk) is a new way for schools to find casual workshop and session leaders/providers. The site currently covers the areas of sport, art, music, drama etc. Any registered school will be able to post on the site simple job descriptions outlining what they want, when and who to contact. To find out more please email Sarah Needham at schoolsnm@live.co.uk

Online Resources for the Teaching of Speaking and Listening Skills

A new website, '[Youth Amplified](http://www.youthamplified.com),' seeks to support the teaching and learning of speaking and listening skills among 11-18 year-olds. The free-to-use resources include animated films, videos, a self-evaluation quiz and a guide designed to help teachers across the curriculum, and youth workers to support young people in the development of these skills. To access these resources please visit www.youthamplified.com.

Events

Academy Conversion event – 22 May

SCHOOLS NorthEast Commercial Supporter, Samuel Phillips, is hosting a free event for schools to discuss academy conversion. Speakers include the Department for Education's Academy Conversion Division and a Head Teacher who has been through the conversion process. There will also be a debate when the audience will have a chance to put their questions to a panel.

The event is taking place on Tuesday 22 May 3.00pm until 5.30pm at Middlesbrough Football Club, Riverside Stadium. For more information and to book [click here](#) or email sarah@beaconhouse-events.co.uk or phone 0191 289 4805.

Making the most of academy status – 13 June

Ward Hadaway is hosting a free seminar in conjunction with RSM Tenon on making the most of academy status.

Legal and financial education experts will look at the key principles and know-how to ensure that your school is making the most of its academy status and they will also be joined by the Head Teacher of an established academy to share their experiences so far. Experts will look at the on-going issues that you and your governing body will be facing. For further information [please click here](#) or contact Michelle McBride on 0191 204 4029 or email michelle.mcbride@wardhadaway.com to book a place.

Education conference - 15 June

Sacred Heart is working with Leading Learning to help organise a conference based at St. James' Park on 15 June. Learn how to create a culture to enrich, extend and accelerate achievement for all.

Why attend?

- Understand how to engage modern learners
- Understand how to extend, enrich and accelerate learning
- Understand how to support your colleagues' development
- Understand how to create a culture of learning for students and staff

The delegate rate is £149 (+ VAT) and SCHOOLS NorthEast Enhanced Members receive a 15% discount. To find out more and to book a place on the Leading Learning Conference go to www.outstandinglearnersoutstandingteaching.com

Careers Conference – 21 June

If you are looking for an opportunity to reflect on your current role in school and think about the next steps in your career then attend the Shiremoor Teaching School Alliance's Careers Conference. There will be a chance to hear from practising leaders about the challenges and rewards at various levels of leadership along with workshops and access to individual support, advice and guidance.

The free conference will take place at the Vermont Hotel on the 21 June between 9.30am and 2.30pm. To book a place email shiremoorteachingschlalliance@gmail.com

School to School

This week we spoke to Sharon Trundley from Westmoor Primary in North Tyneside.

Our school is... fun, inclusive and passionate about learning. It's the place everyone wants to be. We even have a duck nesting in a planter in Foundation Stage yard. Is this a ploy to bypass admissions for a much sought after Reception place?

Our school motto/mission/vision is... Imagination and celebration

Our school is good at... teamwork. We have strong, passionate governors, a committed staff team, supportive parents and children who work together with outstanding results. An excellent climate for learning, with a good level of challenge for all.

Our school is working on... completing our woodland garden. After many obstacles (soil testing, boundary disputes for fencing), we will install our pond this week and then add the finishing touches. We have a winding path with brick edging, individually decorated by each of our 350 children, a maze with a range of shrubs, a mirrored corner, a bird hide, a willow tunnel, mounds of branches, many trees and flowers and logs for seating. And importantly, a big mound of mud and areas to dig and get dirty.

The biggest challenges for our school are...ICT. Trying to keep up with ever changing technology, yet spending what little money we have, to invest in the best possible resources. For the first year in a long time, we do not have a deficit budget. It is great not to be constrained by finances when simply trying to be creative and provide the best opportunities for our children.

We think other schools would be interested in our... involvement with Shiremoor Teaching School Alliance. As part of this group we have had the opportunity and freedom to shape something new and innovative. We have forged our own path and hope that we can share good practice and learn from one another. Our CPD is comprehensive and varied. See the prospectus on www.shiremoor-primary.co.uk Follow us on twitter @shiremoorTSA

We would be interested in hearing from other schools about...ICT, particularly control and monitoring, using hardware such as lego nxt. Also in general, continuing to make the most of ICT across the whole school and across all areas of the curriculum.

Question from last week's school: Does a class need a classroom? The obvious response would be "of course not". We make full use of the outdoors, our woodland garden and the nearby lake to make teaching stimulating and captivating. Teaching extends far beyond a brick wall. However, a well resourced, well organised classroom can be equally inspiring, giving the children a space which is theirs. An engaging learning wall and displays celebrating every child's achievements can support learning. Our children and staff take great pride in their learning environment and the classrooms really are a fun place to be.

Our question to next week's school is? *If your school was chosen to open the Olympic ceremony with a song, what song would you choose and why?*

Welcome to new Commercial Supporters

SCHOOLS NorthEast has a growing network of Commercial Supporters who help us to be able to continue to work on behalf of North East schools. The network offers opportunities for schools to interact with organisations that provide a range of products and services to education many of whom offer special discounts and unique provisions for SCHOOLS NorthEast member schools.

This week we are delighted to welcome [Avec Partnerships](#) and [Contour Education Services](#). Visit the [SCHOOLS NorthEast Marketplace](#) to find out what they can offer your school.

In the last 7 days we learnt...

- [School entry should be delayed until six, researchers urge](#)
- [UK childcare needs to be more affordable](#)
- [Schools get King James Bible to mark 400th anniversary](#)
- [A third of primary school children 'cannot swim'](#)

Have a great week!

If you have any issues you would like to see covered in the Update, or any other comments, I would love to hear from you at the above address.