

[Response to Sunday Times story about A level grades](#)

Today's Sunday Times (11 August 2019) contains an article about A level grades that fundamentally misrepresents research conducted by Ofqual. Our report that is cited is not a commentary about whether grades awarded to students are 'right' or 'wrong'. Rather, it considers the implications of there not being a single, right mark for every answer given in every subject, particularly those involving essay writing. This is not new, the issue has existed as long as qualifications have been marked and graded. On that basis, more than one grade could well be a legitimate reflection of a student's performance and they would both be a sound estimate of that student's ability at that point in time based on the available evidence from the assessment they have undertaken.

We take the quality of marking of GCSEs, AS and A levels very seriously. It is recognised that the quality of marking in England is amongst the best in the world. However, we are not complacent and we are committed to working with others in the sector to make marking in every subject the very best it can be. Students, schools and colleges can be assured that the A level results that are awarded are an accurate reflection of their work over the past two years. And if there are instances of marking errors, these can and should be corrected through the normal review process. Universities, employers and others who rely on these qualifications can be confident that this week's results will provide a fair assessment of a student's knowledge and skills.

[Government lifts emergency stop and search restrictions](#)

Home Secretary Priti Patel today (11 August) empowered more than 8,000 police officers to authorise enhanced stop and search powers, as part of Government efforts to crack down on violent crime.

The Home Office is making it simpler for all forces in England and Wales to use Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which empowers officers to stop and search anyone in a designated area without needing reasonable grounds for suspicion if serious violence is anticipated.

The nationwide pilot has been extended from a smaller pilot within the seven forces worst affected by knife crime, following an urgent review commissioned by the Prime Minister.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

We are experiencing a knife crime epidemic and I am determined to put a stop to it.

Police chiefs are clear – stop and search is a vital tool in combatting the scourge of serious violence and keeping people safe.

Today I am giving them my full support and more police authority to approve stop and search to halt this terrible crime in its tracks.

The rollout will see the Home Secretary lift all conditions in the voluntary Best Use of Stop and Search Scheme over the use of Section 60 by:

- reducing the level of authorisation needed for officers to deploy and extend Section 60 from senior officers to inspectors and superintendents
- lowering the degree of certainty required by the authorising officer so they must reasonably believe an incident involving serious violence 'may', rather than 'will', occur
- extending the initial period a Section 60 can be in force from 15 hours to 24, and extending the overall period an extension can be in place from 39 to 48 hours

Last year almost 7,000 arrests for offensive weapons and 900 arrests for firearms were made following a stop and search.

Police forces will still be required to record data around stop and search and monitor its fair and proper use.

In addition, the College of Policing is currently consulting on new guidance for forces on community engagement around stop and search.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Stop and Search, Deputy Chief Constable Adrian Hanstock, said:

The authority to stop and search people in appropriate circumstances is a necessary power that allows police officers to tackle violence in our communities and prevent people from becoming victims of crime.

Every day officers across the country seize horrifying weapons and are preventing further injuries and deaths by using their search powers.

Section 60 powers to stop and search anyone within a designated area can be extremely effective when there have been violent incidents and police commanders believe there is a high risk of further violence occurring.

The extension of this pilot to all 43 police forces, and British

Transport Police across the rail network, will help to reduce bureaucracy and allow officers to use Section 60 controls much faster when it is clear it is in the public interest to do so.

Today the Government has also announced plans to shortly publish draft guidance on measures in the Offensive Weapons Act that relate to the sale and delivery of corrosive products and knives, and Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs).

This will pave the way for new criminal offences that will help to stop knives and dangerous acids making their way onto our streets, including preventing delivery to under 18s of knives bought online and making it illegal to sell and deliver corrosive products to under 18s.

KCPOs are civil orders which can be imposed by courts on any person aged 12 or over to prevent vulnerable individuals from becoming involved in knife crime.

KCPOs will enable courts to impose conditions – such as curfews or requirements to attend educational courses – that will help people resist being drawn into violence and help police officers manage those at risk in the community.

They will act as a deterrent to stop those most at risk from carrying knives, and these will be piloted once a public consultation has been completed on the guidance.

The Home Secretary added:

Our Offensive Weapons Act will give police extra powers to take dangerous weapons out of criminals' hands, while Knife Crime Prevention Orders will act as a deterrent to those at risk of becoming involved in knife crime.

[Record-breaking year for hen harrier breeding](#)

Hen harriers have enjoyed a record year for breeding success in England, [Natural England](#) has announced today (11 August).

2019 has been a highly successful year for the iconic bird of prey in England, with a total of 15 nests producing 15 successful breeding pairs and 47 chicks – improving on the previous highpoint of 46 set in 2006.

The positive result means the last two years have produced 81 fledged chicks, surpassing the total for the previous five years put together (55). The chicks have also hatched in a wider variety of areas this year, including in Northumberland, Yorkshire Dales, Nidderdale, Derbyshire and Lancashire – leading to hopes that a corner has been turned in the restoration of the hen harrier population.

Tony Juniper, Chairman of Natural England, said:

I'd like to thank all of the organisations, staff and volunteers who've helped to make this a better breeding season for one of England's most iconic birds.

While it is very welcome to see this improvement, we must remember that the hen harrier is still very far from where it should be as a breeding species in England, not least due to illegal persecution.

I will be working with Natural England colleagues to pursue all options for the recovery of this wonderful bird, a creature that inspires and brings joy to so many people. It would be a tragic loss for our country, children and grandchildren if this majestic bird was to remain so scarce, or even disappear, in the future.

Once again a wide range of organisations have come together to work in partnership to make sure that the hen harrier chicks are well looked after and protected for the future. This collective effort has helped improve the communication and liaison between land managers.

This includes: [Natural England](#), [RSPB](#), [Forestry Commission](#), [the Moorland Association](#), [United Utilities](#), [the National Trust](#), [Hawk and Owl Trust](#), [Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority](#), [Northumberland National Park Authority](#), [Peak District National Park Authority](#), [Nidderdale & Forest of Bowland Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) and [Northumberland Wildlife Trust](#), [Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust](#), local police forces, individual Estates and their keepers, farmers, and a large number of volunteer raptor enthusiasts.

A high proportion of this year's chicks have been fitted with satellite tags, which will allow Natural England to monitor the progress of the birds as they move away from their nest areas.

In February, Natural England published [a study paper which analysed the findings of satellite tagging data collected over 10 years](#). The study revealed that young hen harriers in England suffer abnormally high mortality and the most likely cause is illegal killing.

Support for this year's success

Superintendent Nick Lyall, Chair of the raptor persecution priority delivery group, said:

This is welcome news and I hope that through Operation Owl we can help to keep this new generation of hen harriers safe from persecution. I would encourage the public to be our eyes and ears on wildlife crime and make sure it is properly reported to local police forces for investigation.

Ian McPherson, Member Champion for the Natural Environment for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, said:

At long last, there are grounds for cautious optimism with hen harriers again breeding successfully in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. These are magnificent birds, ideally suited to the Dales, and their long absence has shamed us all.

Dr Adam Smith, of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, said:

More hen harriers better distributed has been our conservation goal for many years. So the trend toward more harriers breeding successfully in the English uplands over the last two years is very encouraging. We hope successful grouse moors managing a co-existence with harriers will become a regular part of our moorland management scene.

Amanda Anderson, Director of the Moorland Association, added:

It has been a fantastic year for hen harriers with a year-on-year increase in both the geographical range of the nests and the type of land on which they have successfully fledged, most notably on privately owned grouse moors.

The collaboration on the ground has been second to none. There is a real commitment to restoring the population among those with rural and conservation interests at heart and we believe that we are beginning to turn a corner.

The trial brood management scheme is a historic and vitally important part of the efforts being made to bring back hen harriers and we are hugely encouraged by progress to date. Grouse moor owners signing up to this trial was a key moment.

Prior to its introduction in 2017 there were only three nests and 10 fledged chicks, we have now seen a 15-fold increase in the number of chicks over the past two years. There is still a long way to go but we are on the right track.

Nests in different places

Many of the nests (11) were on land managed for grouse shooting.

Six of the nests were diversionary fed, offering supplementary food to the chicks since they have hatched. This technique ensures a better fledging rate and diverts the adult birds' attention from taking grouse chicks.

The three nests which failed were all in Northumberland – two were lost to bad weather and the third was predated.

Together, all of the partner organisations are determined to see an improvement in the conservation outcomes of hen harriers and are working to bring about a cessation of the persecution of this magnificent bird as part of sustaining economic driven grouse moors.

New approaches

The introduction of a trial brood management scheme in 2018 through which landowners volunteered to test new methods to help reduce parent bird predation on grouse chicks has been welcomed as a positive development in efforts to improve hen harrier numbers.

Brood management is part of a scientific trial to find another mechanism to reduce predation of grouse chicks. The hen harrier chicks have been released back into the locality from where they were collected once they were capable of fending for themselves.

Recently, [Operation Owl](#) became a national campaign working with the National Police Chiefs' Council and police forces across England and Wales. This scheme will raise awareness of raptor persecution amongst the wider public and police officers. It may also lead to increased reporting of criminal activity against wildlife.

[Activation of Bellwin Scheme and cash boost for Whaley Bridge](#)

Local communities and businesses impacted by last week's heavy rain and flooding will have access to £5.25m to support their recovery, following confirmation from the Government today (Saturday 10 August).

Businesses affected by the Whaley Bridge evacuation will receive up to £100,000 in emergency funding to cover uninsurable costs. This follows a commitment from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to match regional support of £100,000 delivered through the local Business Recovery Fund.

Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom said:

The recent bad weather has had an enormously disruptive impact on the Whaley Bridge economy.

We're providing £100,000 of emergency funding to affected businesses to help them get back up and running as quickly as possible. We're also working with the local authority and partners to ensure practical support on the ground.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has activated the government's emergency Bellwin scheme to reimburse local authorities for the immediate costs they have paid out in support of the emergency in Derbyshire and flooding in Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire.

Under the scheme, local authorities dealing with the Whaley Bridge emergency and for flooding in Wainfleet and Richmondshire can apply to have 100% of the money they have spent, above a threshold, reimbursed by the government. This could be for items including rest centres, temporary accommodation and staff overtime.

A further package of support, including £150,000 of funding will also go to High Peak Borough Council, which includes the town of Whaley Bridge, to support their initiatives to help the recovery of the local economy.

Local Government Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

I am grateful for the work the local authorities in Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire have done, and continue to do, to respond to the flooding and disruption, and I want to praise local residents for the resilience they have shown during this worrying time.

The Government is committed to helping the places affected by these recent events to get back on their feet. We have therefore activated the Bellwin scheme which will provide significant financial support to the affected areas, and we are also providing an initial £150,000 immediately to support Whaley Bridge's recovery.

Alongside damage to the Toddbrook Dam in Whaley Bridge, parts of North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire experienced unprecedented rainfall this summer, causing flash flooding and damage to homes, businesses and agricultural land.

Farms in in Wainfleet and North Yorkshire were particularly hard-hit, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is making up to £2 million available for farming businesses affected.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

The recent spells of heavy rain and bad weather have had devastating effects on farms, communities and businesses, and it is vital that we help local people to get back on their feet.

We are working closely with key agencies in affected areas – including Whaley Bridge – to find the best ways to support them, and make sure businesses can recover as quickly as possible.

Finally, two damaged bridges in Yorkshire will be replaced thanks to a £3 million investment from the Department for Transport.

The one-off, exceptional funding will help North Yorkshire County Council repair the bridges on Grinton Moor and near Cogden Beck as quickly as possible, and reconnect two sides of Grinton Moor – saving up to 60 minutes of driving time.

Roads Minister Baroness Vere said:

Yorkshire has seen some of the worst of the recent spell of bad weather and drivers have faced significant and frustrating diversions following damage to local infrastructure.

This investment will allow North Yorkshire to get started on the repairs as quickly as possible, so that communities can return to normal.

[Foreign Secretary call with the Chief Executive of Hong Kong Carrie Lam](#)

The Foreign Secretary has called Carrie Lam to discuss his concerns about the situation in Hong Kong, and the protests there.

The Foreign Secretary underlined the strength of the relationship between the UK and Hong Kong, noting our support for Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy as provided for in the Joint Declaration and our commitment to the principle of 'One country, Two systems'.

The Foreign Secretary condemned violent acts by all sides but emphasised the right to peaceful protest, noting that hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong people had chosen this route to express their views. He underlined that the violence should not cloud the lawful actions of the majority.

The Foreign Secretary emphasised the need to find a way forward through meaningful political dialogue, and a fully independent investigation into

recent events as a way to build trust.