

Changes to the National Transfer Scheme

Responsibility for unaccompanied asylum seeking children will be more fairly distributed across the UK as part of new and vital updates to the National Transfer Scheme.

The changes to the scheme, announced by the Home Secretary and Education Secretary today (Thursday 10 June), will encourage more local authorities to take part in a planned schedule for taking into care children who arrive in the UK alone and claim asylum – ensuring all areas in the UK play their part.

The scheme will provide local authorities with increased funding and take into account local pressures on local services. By having a 'rota' of these transfers, the updated scheme will provide regions and local authorities with greater clarity as to the number of children to expect and the timing of those placements, allowing them time to plan ahead and better manage their capacity.

Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice Chris Philp said:

I am grateful for the many local authorities that support a significant number of vulnerable young asylum seekers.

But the current system has not been working as intended with significant pressures being placed on particular areas. Caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children is a national responsibility, which is why we are introducing a system that will ensure that these children and young people continue to receive the support they need whilst also ensuring a fairer distribution across the UK.

We recognise the financial impact the current asylum system can have on the public purse which is why we are bringing forward the New Plan for Immigration which will fix the broken system welcoming those most in need through safe and legal routes, while preventing abuse of the system.

There are a number of factors informing the new managed approach including the size of the child population in that region, the number of supported asylum seekers and the capacity of children's services.

The improved voluntary scheme includes increased funding totalling more than £20m for local authorities (backdated from 1 April this year) to support former care leavers, and additional support for local authorities.

Minister for Children and Families Vicky Ford said:

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can be some of the most vulnerable in our care, having often faced dreadful exploitation from traffickers.

We know that many areas have played their part to date but it's absolutely right that local authorities around the country step up and share the role of supporting these young people to settle where appropriate and make valuable contributions to their communities.

Other improvements to the National Transfer Scheme announced today include:

- Distributing a pilot team of expert social workers to support local authorities throughout the UK on age assessment, ahead of broader age assessment reforms under the New Plan for Immigration.
- £6 million Department for Education funding for targeted support for the local authorities facing the biggest pressures in caring for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding has been distributed to 56 councils in England that applied.

The changes to the National Transfer Scheme will come into effect as soon as possible and are as a result of a joint Home Office and DfE consultation with local authorities across the UK. This saw more than 200 responses including the views of young people and NGOs.

Cllr Nick Forbes, Chair of the Local Government Association's Asylum, Migration and Refugee Task Group, said:

Councils have a strong track record for many years in welcoming asylum-seeking children, working with central government, national partners and regional bodies.

We are pleased that the government has acted on LGA calls for additional funding to help with the challenges faced by councils to provide support to children and young people starting a new life in the UK. This funding will go some way to bridging the gap between government funding and what councils pay to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) leaving care.

Councils will continue to face difficulties in finding appropriate homes for these young people, while ongoing challenges around age assessment and asylum claims add uncertainty for both councils and young people. By working closely together, councils and the government can make the national transfer arrangements work to enable all areas of the country to play their part in supporting our asylum system for both children and adults in a fair and transparent way.

Change to maximum Plan 2 and the Plan 3 student loan interest rates

News story

The Department for Education (DfE) has announced a change to maximum Plan 2 and the Plan 3 student loan interest rates



From the 1 July 2021 until the 30 September 2021, the maximum interest rate applied to Plan 2 Income Contingent Repayment (ICR) student loans and the interest rate applied to Plan 3 ICR student loans will be capped in line with the prevailing market rate for comparable unsecured personal loans, which have recently reduced. From the 1 October 2021, the maximum Plan 2 and the Plan 3 ICR student loan interest rates is expected to revert to RPI +3%.

The Government regularly monitors the interest rates set on student loans against the interest rates prevailing on the market for comparable loans. Following a decline in the prevailing market rate, the Government will temporarily reduce the maximum Plan 2 and the Plan 3 student loan interest rate in line with the prevailing market rate. The reduction will be 0.3 percentage point on the maximum student loan interest rate to reflect the average market rates during the preceding monitoring period.

Student loan interest rates are updated each year to take account of changes in the Retail Price Index (RPI). The updates are applied annually at the start of each academic year, 1 September. To take into account this annual change in the ordinary student loan interest rates two separate caps will be implemented, one for the period 1 July to 31 August and one for the period 1 to 30 September:

- The maximum Plan 2 ICR student loan interest rate and the Plan 3 ICR student loan interest rate will be 5.3% between 1 July and 31 August.
- The maximum Plan 2 ICR student loan interest rate and the Plan 3 ICR student loan interest rate will be 4.2% between 1 September and 30 September.
- The maximum Plan 2 ICR student loan interest rate and the Plan 3 ICR student loan interest rate is expected to revert to RPI +3% from 1

October.

Interest rates on Plan 2 ICR student loans vary by income. Where the applied interest rate is already below the level of the cap, the interest rates will be unaffected.

- The SoS is required by section 22(4) of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (THEA) to ensure that student loan interest rates are either below the prevailing market rate, or no higher than the prevailing market rate if the loan offers better terms and conditions.
- The Department for Education and the Welsh Government have confirmed the change following a decrease in the prevailing market rate.
- Plan 2 borrowers will continue to repay 9% of their earnings over the repayment threshold. The repayment threshold for Plan 2 ICR loans remains at £27,295.
- Plan 2 ICR loans are those loans taken out for a course starting after the 1st September 2012 (England and Wales).
- Plan 3 borrowers will continue to repay 6% of their earnings over the repayment threshold. The repayment threshold for Plan 3 ICR loans remains at £21,000.
- Plan 3 ICR loans are those loans taken out for Postgraduate level study.
- Plan 1 ICR loans, those loans taken out for a course starting before the 1st September 2012 are not affected.
- By “RPI” we mean the percentage increase between the retail prices all items index published by the Office for National Statistics for the two Marches immediately before the commencement of the academic year. By “RPI” we mean the percentage increase between the retail prices all items index published by the Office for National Statistics for the two Marches immediately before the commencement of the academic year.

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[Simon Lebus speech at the AELP National Conference 2021](#)

Good morning. It is a great pleasure to be here with you today at the AELP Spring Conference. My name is Simon Lebus and I am the Interim Chief Regulator at Ofqual.

I am especially delighted to have the opportunity to speak to you today as it feels as if we are really at the start of what feels like a pivotal time for vocational skills and training.

It is a time when a new survey has found that almost as many middle-class parents now want their child to take a vocational qualification (43 per cent)

as want their child to go to university.

It is a time when innovation in e-invigilation and e-assessment has been driven forward at a hugely accelerated pace – something which would have taken years previously.

And it is a time when the government is promising a lifetime skills guarantee and undergraduate-type loans for all training, not just academic degrees.

Today I'm going to talk to you about Ofqual's role as a regulator in supporting the paradigm shift for skills that we can all see on the near horizon.

I'll also talk a bit about how we have been seeing the regulated community respond to the challenges that have been presented in awarding qualifications over the last couple of years.

And I'll finish with a brief look ahead to 2022 and beyond.

In a recent piece in The Times, William Hague said that "Education... is the crossroads of government policy, and if it isn't done well every other idea will end up idling in a traffic jam, waiting for the right skills to be in the right place."

I think it's fair to say that the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill has been designed to ease that traffic jam and open the road, and in the spirit of making that journey as straightforward as possible we have been working closely with the Department to take on board those elements of the bill that relate to ourselves.

We see the bill in particular as underpinning current arrangements between Ofqual and the Institute. We already have well-developed collaborative approaches to reviewing qualifications and assessments before they are approved by the Institute. The bill expands the remit of the Institute in approving and monitoring technical education qualifications and, therefore, the scope of the areas of our collaboration.

One area on which we already collaborate closely is External Quality Assurance – EQA and I think it would be worth now saying a few words about that.

EQA is about ensuring quality in end-point assessments for the apprentices and employers that rely on them to demonstrate that apprentices are competent in the occupation they have trained for.

It ensures that there is a consistent quality approach to assessment across an apprenticeship standard, regardless of which end-point assessment organisation is delivering the assessment and where and when this is carried out. And that the end-point assessment captures what employers set out to capture in the Apprenticeship standard.

Ofqual works directly with employers on how end-point assessments are delivered, and we meet with a number of professional bodies and employer

representative groups to improve our understanding of how regulation impacts their sector.

For example, we are working with the Sports Ground Safety Authority, as assessments in this sector have been adapted considerably due to live venues such as football stadiums being closed for some time. As with many vocational qualifications, public safety is paramount so it is important, as a regulator, that we have a good understanding of these adaptations, and understand whether there will be any risks to being able to conduct assessments of occupational competence, where these can only take place at live events, given current industry challenges relating to staff shortages and a lack of live events taking place.

In January 2020 we ran our first 'sector' or 'route' forum. As the EQA provider for all the standards in the hair and beauty route, this made it a logical place for us to start. The forum was attended by the trailblazer group, EPAOs and the Institute.

As a result of this forum the trailblazer group agreed to develop a set of frequently asked questions to use alongside the relevant assessment plan, to ensure consistency between end-point assessment providers.

The EQA Framework states that delivery of end-point assessments should be carried out by organisations that are proven to have the right level of both sector and assessment expertise. This means that all EPAOs who deliver end-point assessments for which Ofqual is the EQA provider need to be recognised by us.

The process of gaining recognition is rigorous – as is the ongoing need to comply with our general conditions of recognition once recognised. But applying rigour does not mean that we stifle creativity or innovation – not at all.

We encourage awarding organisations to think creatively about what they do – never more so than in their response to awarding qualifications during the pandemic. We have seen some excellent examples of remote assessment and remote invigilation which, when done well, can bring convenience for providers and for students, and allow results to be awarded that may otherwise have been delayed. So, thank you all for being so keen to adapt and willing to innovate in your own assessment activities as a result – it has made a difference.

Other innovations include the emergence of micro-credentials – mini-qualifications that demonstrate skills, knowledge or experience in a given subject area or capability. Giving candidates the ability to study for soft and hard skills, in subjects such as self-management, teamwork, digital marketing and data analytics, micro-credentials offer employers a clearer understanding of that candidate's professional knowledge and their ability to apply it.

There has also been a shift in focus to the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises with the government's plans to introduce portable apprenticeships

to support apprentices and employers in making use of apprenticeships in sectors where short-term, project-based employment is the norm. With the ability to take a 3 year approach over a series of 9 month contracts, learners can 'port' their qualification around different employers. Of course, a really strong high-quality provider base is going to be critical for all of that, so that employers and apprentices can have confidence in the quality of the training, and that is where you come in.

And what does all of this exciting innovation and flexibility in learning and the awarding of vocational qualifications mean for those of us here today?

It means that we will need to adapt how we operate and have the conviction to work together to make the changes that will be necessary to not just our systems and processes, but to our attitudes. Ofqual will need to ensure that its regulatory model is fit for purpose and that we continue to be part of opening up that road.

To help us do that, we speak directly to colleges and training providers so that we can understand how our regulation of awarding organisations is being experienced by those who are closest to it.

We know, through providers, and through our conversations with AoC, AELP and HOLEX, that the sector remains concerned about the Department's policy for the awarding of FSQs this summer. I have personally spoken with Jane Hickie about this, and we will continue to listen to the concerns of the provider community on all aspects of the awarding arrangements and how they are working for them.

As you will know, in summer 2021 – A levels and GCSE results will be coming out in the same week, and many level 2 and level 3 vocational qualifications will be coming at the same time so as not to disadvantage students who will be using them to progress. But although results days will look different on the surface, it will be, as always, an anxious time for learners.

Just as they have needed their parents' and teachers' support, they will also need the support of employers, who may find that they are taking on new employees who have a slightly different skill set than those they are used to. Employees who, although they may have been disadvantaged by being out of the classroom a great deal over the last 18 months, will have developed other skills from learning in a different way, such as expertise in using video conferencing platforms and other business tools.

However different the experience of those new employees is, they will nonetheless have achieved their qualification and are now ready for the chance to show what they can do.

I would also like to take this opportunity to assure you that arrangements for 2022 are already underway. We recognise that students who will be taking exams and assessments next year will have had significant disruption to their education this year. Alongside the Department, and with the awarding organisations and wider stakeholders, we are considering what might need to be done to ensure that students are able to sit exams and take other

assessments safely and receive grades that are fair, even if further disruption does occur. This will of course, draw on lessons learnt during the pandemic.

Finally, I would like to note that Alison Wolf's landmark report in 2011 stated that many good vocational courses and institutions existed "in spite of" the funding and regulatory system. Let's look to the promises made in the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill to make the funding and regulatory system really work for the benefit of learners of all ages.

[Allocation of Housing and Homelessness \(Eligibility\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#)

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[Wellbeing for education recovery: grant determination letter](#)

The wellbeing for education recovery project builds on the support put in place under the Wellbeing for Education Return Scheme in 2020 and aims to provide additional support to state-funded schools and colleges. This will enable education staff to promote and support the wellbeing and mental health of pupils and students during this recovery period.

The Secretary of State for Education makes grant determinations under section 31 of the [Local Government Act 2003](#).

The letter:

- sets out payments for the current financial year, 2021 to 2022
- includes supporting guidance outlining how we intend local authorities to use the funding

The letter for 2020 to 2021 is also available.