

Education update – Monday 27 June

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(Below is a summary of some of the main education news stories from the last week. They do not reflect the opinions of *The Exams Office*)

Teachers to strike across England on 5 July

Teachers across England will strike on 5 July after members of the National Union of Teachers voted by more than nine to one in favour of industrial action.

The last national teachers strike, in July 2014, over teachers' pay, pensions and working conditions were highly disruptive to both parents and children, as around a fifth of schools across England and Wales were forced to close.

NUT said the decision to strike was a response to funding concerns along with continuing issues over conditions for teachers.

The union is demanding an increase in funding for schools and education, and want to see guaranteed terms and conditions in all types of schools.

It also wants to resume negotiations on contracts that will allow teacher workloads to be addressed.

Kevin Courtney, acting general secretary of the NUT, said: "The NUT is not taking action lightly. In light of the huge funding cuts to schools, worsening terms and conditions, and unmanageable and exhausting workloads, teachers cannot be expected to go on without significant change. The effects on children's education are also real and damaging."

For more details see the [Independent website](#)

Tougher GCSE risks driving pupils away from maths

Experts are warning that the government's tougher new maths GCSE is so difficult that it risks driving pupils away from the subject.

TES understands that one exam board has told teachers the higher-tier version of the GCSE will be so demanding that pupils could achieve a grade 4 – the equivalent of today's C grade – with just 12 per cent of the marks.

Sue Pope, the chair of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics' general council, said: "This is going to put children off wanting to carry on studying maths and we really want children to study maths post-16. Pupils will think, 'I may have got a C but I couldn't do most of the exam'."

The new qualification, which will be sat from next summer, is deliberately designed to be more stretching. But there are growing fears that the GCSE will be counterproductive and jeopardise the past decade's rise in A-level maths entries.

Charlie Stripp, director of the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, said: "We applaud the aspiration [to raise standards in maths] but worry about whether schools and teachers will have the support they need to meet it and, if not, whether the changes might have the opposite effect of what was intended, by putting people off if they don't have access to what they need to be able to succeed."

"Students that are well prepared for the new GCSE should be more likely to choose maths A-level, but for students who are less well-prepared it may have a negative effect on wanting to carry on with maths."

For more details see the [TES website](#)

Poor pupils 'are still let down', warns Ofsted boss

Poor pupils are still being let down by the English education system, Ofsted boss Sir Michael Wilshaw has warned.

In a speech last Thursday, he highlighted the "appalling injustice" of children from poorer homes continuing to fall behind their wealthier peers.

Sir Michael called for a tougher stance on "feckless parents" who allow children to break school rules.

The Department for Education said every child, no matter what their background, deserved a world-class education.

He also defended testing in schools, saying this offers disadvantaged pupils the prospect of a better life.

In a speech at the Festival of Education, Sir Michael said that the failure to improve the educational chances of the poor "disfigures" England's school system.

"The needle has barely moved," he said. "In 2005, the attainment gap between free school meal [FSM] and non-FSM pupils in secondary schools was 28 percentage points - it is still 28 percentage points now."

For more detail see the [BBC website](#)

Teaching assistants face violence at work, says union

More than half (53%) of UK teaching assistants (TAs) have experienced physical violence at school in the past year, a poll by Unison has found.

The survey of more than 8,000 TAs found three-quarters (76%) had witnessed some form of physical violence.

More than half (53%) had experienced, and 73% had witnessed, verbal threats at school.

Ministers say no-one should have to work in fear of violence or harassment, in or outside school or online.

Unison surveyed 14,514 members who work in school support roles - such as technicians, administrative staff, caterers, cleaners, and librarians. Of these, 8,211 worked as teaching or classroom assistants.

It found that three-fifths (60%) of TAs had experienced - and 69% had witnessed - other verbal abuse at school and more than a third (38%) had experienced - 79% had witnessed - bullying at school.

For more details see the [BBC website](#)

How should schools tackle the vote for 'Brexit'?

The decision by the UK to leave the EU will pose teachers a number of issues today and over the coming weeks. Many teachers will face a difficult job of explaining the EU referendum to students – TES reveals how the profession is reacting to the challenge.

A TES poll found that 70% of teaching staff intended to vote for remain so there is also a potential disconnect with parents to negotiate carefully.

There will also be difficult questions for teachers in schools with a high proportion of students from the EU, and a dilemma as to how much – if at all – teachers directly deal with the referendum.

For more details see the [TES website](#)