

UK education minister is firm in GCSE grades row

Gove will not intervene in grades furore, saying exams 'unfit for purpose'

By Alison Kershaw

MICHAEL Gove refused to intervene in the row over English GCSE grade boundaries on Monday as he warned the exams are "unfit for purpose".

Ministers should not "meddle" in decisions made by Ofqual, the independent exams regulator, the Education Secretary said.

He told MPs that it is down to Ofqual and exam boards to decide how to mark papers and rejected fresh calls to order a regrading of this summer's English GCSE examinations.

Gove, who had faced calls over the last few days to order a regrading of the key exam, was answering scheduled education questions in the Commons Monday afternoon.

He said that problems had arisen from the structure of the GCSE exam and that the Government was reforming the system and removing modular exams.

For the first time this year, students taking GCSE English sat modular exams and submitted pieces of "controlled assessment" - coursework completed under strict classroom supervision.

Shadow education secretary Stephen Twigg said: "Over the past 10 days we've had countless examples of young people getting a D for work assessed this summer that would have got a C grade in January."

One head, Sally Coates of Burlington Danes Academy in west London, had said it is "blatantly unfair to move the goalposts without warning midway throughout the year", Twigg said, asking Gove if he agreed.



The row over this summer's GCSE English results began as it emerged that GCSE English grading boundaries had been altered between January and June

"I do agree that these examinations are unfit for purpose and need to change," the Education Secretary replied.

He later added: "Ofqual is an independent regulator accountable to Parliament. If ministers were to interfere in Ofqual's decisions,

they would be meddling where they should not interfere."

Gove said it was "opportunistic" for Twigg to make the case for this.

He also suggested that there should be a greater degree of transparency about the grade-setting

and marking processes.

"That is one of the reasons Ofqual exists as an independent regulator and it's one of the reasons why it should continue to do that job, not ministers," Gove added.

The row over this summer's GCSE English results

began as national GCSE results were published and it emerged that GCSE English grading boundaries had been altered between January and June.

Headteachers have predicted that thousands of pupils have been affected by the move, with concerns centring around those who were expected to get a C but ended up with a D grade.

On Friday, Ofqual announced it would be inappropriate for either of the sets of exams to be regraded, as teaching unions continued to threaten legal action over the issue.

Pupils who are unhappy with their results have been told that they can resit the GCSE in November.

Hugh Bayley, Labour MP for York Central, asked Gove if he would advise Ofqual to re-mark papers according to January's boundaries.

Gove replied: "I share, sadly, the sadness that many teachers and many students will feel about what happened with GCSE English this year."

"I think it's appropriate that we all learn lessons about some of the mistakes that were made in introducing an examination modular in style, which was not best equipped to ensure that all students could perform well and be treated fairly."

But he added he would not tell Ofqual what to do.

"I will not because ... when he was supporting the Government, Mr Ed Balls pointed out that Ofqual was an independent regulator of standards, independent of ministers reporting directly to Parliament."

"He said 'I am not going to second guess its work' and I fall to that position."

RIMS opens the door to music

LIANA Varnavides, head of the recently-established Royal International Music School (or RIMS) expounds her passion for learning music when asked why the school was opened.

This is the third year the awarded Royal International Music School is teaching children on the island, and already it has built a reputation based on mutual respect, devotion to music and the hope of giving every child the chance to flourish. "We personally feel the need to give opportunities to children," says Varnavides, who teaches piano at the school.

All registrations are accepted, regardless of when they are submitted. And should a student not be able to afford an instrument to practise on, the school has instruments to rent out to students at low prices. Even for the school's renowned piano lessons, a keyboard is provided to those for whom access to a piano is not feasible.

The school's curriculum begins with lessons from the age of two until four, where parent participation is included. These group lessons, conducted twice a week, focus on developing the child's hand-eye coordination, rhythm and speech.

After the age of four, children can begin to attend lessons without parents, but with well-respected and qualified instructors of which there are seven - even Irina Zeniou, a Russian opera singer, is a member of the staff at RIMS.

By the age of six, children are able to distinguish notes, read and sing them, and can choose to study saxophone, guitar, piano, violin, clarinet and even accordion. Musical theory starts after the third year, with eight grades in total, and exams are offered via the British Council for internationally recognised certificates.

For more information, call RIMS at: 99-47-62-61 or email: rims.cyprus@yahoo.com

Opportunities for US with Brazilian students

U.S. colleges, holding onto a shrinking lead as the world's biggest educator of international students, are eyeing a promising new market in Brazil, an emerging economy with big hopes for the future but a shortage of skilled labour.

US Commerce Undersecretary Francisco Sanchez recently led officials from 66 US colleges and universities to Brasilia, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro on what he told Reuters is the biggest trade mission of the Obama administration.

The seven-day visit capitalised on Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's "Science Without Borders" initiative aimed at reducing her nation's skills deficit by sending as many as 101,000 students to study abroad over the next four years. "She's stated publicly that she wants half of those to



Brazilian 'Science without Borders' pupils in the US

go to the United States and specifically to study in the STEM areas: science, technology, engineering and math," Sanchez said. Brazil's skilled-worker shortage is a major challenge on the country's path to developed-nation status.

In addition to spurring Brazil to seek educational opportunities abroad, the shortage has encouraged the government to explore ways to ease immigration rules to attract more foreign professionals.

In sectors ranging from construction and oil exploration to telecommunications, companies complain of not being able to find qualified applicants in Brazil to fill jobs.

While Brazil's own universities are graduating an increasing number of students, many still lack the necessary skills to compete internationally, said João de Castro Neves, a Latin American analyst at the Eurasia group in Washington. "It's basically a matter of quality, not only at the universities but at the primary schools and the secondary schools," Castro Neves said.

China 'brainwashing' in schools opposed

THOUSANDS of protesters surrounded Hong Kong's government headquarters on Monday over a plan to introduce a pro-China school curriculum they describe as an attempt to brainwash students.

Chanting "No to brainwashing education. Withdraw national education", some 8000 people denounced a Hong Kong government-funded booklet entitled "The China Model" they say glorifies China's single Communist party rule while glossing over more brutal aspects of its rule and political controversies. One hunger striker was taken away on a stretcher on the third straight day of protests after fasting for more than 40 hours.

The protests represent a challenge for Hong Kong's new pro-Beijing leader Leung Chun-ying, who took office in July, and who has come under



A hunger striking teacher is taken to hospital on Monday

pressure for policies that have highlighted underlying tensions as the financial hub becomes increasingly intertwined, economically and socially, with China. Polls suggest Hong Kong public distrust towards China is at a record high some

15 years after the former British colony reverted to Chinese rule in 1997, with many fearing Beijing's hand encroaching increasingly into the city's cherished freedoms and political affairs.

Many of the protesters were students who flocked to the demonstrations straight after their first day back at school, some heckling Leung to scrap the scheme or step down. Despite protracted public opposition to the scheme, officials resisted calls to scrap it from local primary and secondary schools, saying it was aimed at instilling a greater sense of national pride and belonging towards China. "The important thing is to ensure that the public concern or the parents' and the students' worry about the so-called brainwashing will not happen," said Hong Kong's number two official, Carrie Lam.