

Briefing and FAQs – Government reforms to performance tables

28th October 2011

Background

Following consultation over the summer, on 27th October the Department for Education announced its reforms to Key Stage 4 performance tables. All qualifications will continue to be recognised at their current equivalences for the next 2 years. For the 2014 performance tables onwards a number of changes will be introduced.

“Through these reforms, therefore, we will help to establish a vocational education for young people in this country that has, and deserves to have, as high a status as more traditional, academic routes.” (from *Qualifications for 14-16 year olds and Performance Tables- DfE October 27th 2011*)

The Changes

First, Government will record and publish *all* qualifications taken at Key Stage 4 – meaning the achievement of any vocational or academic qualification will be recognised publicly in the school and individual student performance data.

Second, Government will introduce a list of vocational and academic qualifications that will contribute to the school’s headline measures including ‘5 GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent)’ and ‘5 GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent) including English and maths’.

In order for qualifications to be recognised in the school’s headline measures, they must demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Be at least as big as a GCSE, 120 guided learning hours (GLH)
- Be graded (i.e. not just pass/fail)
- External assessment must contribute at least 20% to the final grade (very large qualifications have a slightly lower threshold)
- Include synoptic assessment
- Provide good progression, both in the same area and for broader study outside the area
- Have a proven track record (new qualifications which cannot demonstrate a track record, will be placed on the approved list then reviewed after the first cohort completes Key Stage 4)
- Have appropriate content which is suitable for 14-16 year-olds, includes the development of sector- or subject-specific understanding as well as transferable knowledge

The Government has announced that, after this round of changes, the list of headline measure qualifications will next be updated for the 2016 tables.

Third, the headline measures will change from assessing volume of achievement to assessing breadth of achievement. As such, these measures will report on 5 *different* subjects, meaning all qualifications will count as the equivalent of 1 GCSE, regardless of its GLH size.

Finally, no more than 2 non-GCSE qualifications will be able to count as 'equivalents' for one student in the school's headline measures.

These changes only affect the school's headline measures. For other school measures, and for individual students' achievement, all vocational and academic qualifications will continue to be recognised elsewhere in the performance tables.

What this means

This is very positive for BTECs and other vocational qualifications. The changes mean that both vocational and academic qualifications will continue to be recognised in the headline measures and the wider performance tables from 2014 onwards. We welcome this, since it means all Key Stage 4 students can have high quality vocational qualifications recognised alongside a core of GCSEs.

Whilst these reforms change the way that school performance is measured, the Government has been extremely clear that decisions about which qualifications to offer remain solely in the hands of individual teachers and schools. Indeed, the Government's response to the performance table reform consultation explicitly says that, 'where it is in a student's best interest, schools are encouraged to teach qualifications not on the list'.

In this vein, once the headline measure list is published in January 2012, Section 96 – the list of qualifications permitted for pre-16s – will be opened up to include virtually all accredited qualifications.

A rounded curriculum is about equipping young people with the skills they need for the next stage of their life, be that university, further education or work. As such, we understand there is an important place in schools for smaller, flexible, skills-based or taster qualifications, which may not feature in the headline measures. We are committed to continuing to make these qualifications available to teachers and students.

However, at Pearson we understand that schools need to make sure that wherever possible, the hard work of staff and students is recognised through performance measures. For this reason we have been working with Government and the regulator for many months now to ensure that our BTECs continue to be included in the headline indicators after these changes have been introduced. To find out more about our BTEC developments, visit www.btec.co.uk/2012

We are aware that the plans as currently laid out by Government imply some inconsistencies for league tables in 2015. We will be working to keep you updated and trying to resolve any inconsistencies with the Department as new qualifications are phased in.

FAQs

Q: When do these changes come into force?

A: The reforms come into effect for the 2014 tables. This means that, generally speaking, it is the year group who begin year 10 in September 2012 that will be the first whose performance is measured through the reformed league tables.

Q: My school has a 3-year Key Stage 4 and I'm currently delivering BTECs to my year 9s. Do these changes mean that their BTECs won't be recognised in the headline measures when they reach the end of Key Stage 4, in 2014?

A: No – in most cases, they will be recognised. The existing versions of qualifications will still be recognised in the headline measures providing they are as large as a GCSE (120 GLH), have an established track record, provide good progression opportunities, and the awarding body is developing a successor qualification. A list of qualifications which will count will be published early in the new year. If you are running our current QCF BTEC's like this we will be happy to discuss how this will work for you.

Q: Do we know exactly which vocational qualifications will be recognised in the headline measures list?

A: Not yet, but the list of characteristics give us a good indication. For a number of months now we have been working with teachers, Government and the regulator to redevelop our BTECs to ensure that they continue to provide progression, a great learning experience and meet the requirements of the headline measures from 2014 onwards. The Government will publish the first headline measures list early in 2012.

Q: What changes are you making to BTECs?

A: In 2012, we will be introducing new Level 2 BTECs in eight key subjects - Applied Science, Art & Design, Business, Engineering, Health & Social Care, Information & Creative Technology, Performing Arts, and Sport. Each of these will include appropriate external assessment and embedded English and maths. Whilst these are Level 2 qualifications for Level 2 students, they will also provide the opportunity for students' achievements to be recognised and certificated at Level 1, should they not meet the Level 2 standard. We will also introduce new Quality Assurance support to help teachers understand and assess the new qualifications. The remaining Level 2 and 3 BTEC qualifications will be redeveloped for September 2013.

All of this work has been focused on delivering the requirements outlined in the Wolf Review and confirmed today.

For more information on the changes to BTECs, please visit www.btec.co.uk/2012

Q: What if I want to teach a BTEC that isn't in one of the 8 subjects that are being redeveloped for 2012?

A: Don't worry – the 180 and 360 GLH versions of the BTEC should still be recognised in the headline measures for 2014. Qualifications that awarding bodies plan to redevelop for first teaching in 2013 can still feature in headline measures in the 2014 league tables, providing they are as large as a GCSE, have an established track record and provide good progression opportunities. A complete list of such qualifications will be published early in the new year.

Q: When will the specifications for the new BTECs be available?

A: We aim to make draft specifications available to centres in December 2011. These will be subject to Ofqual approval. We are hoping to have accredited, final versions of the specifications in the spring term, ready for first teaching in September 2012.

Q: From 2014, regardless of size, one qualification will be equivalent to 1 GCSE in the headline measures. Does this mean schools can't offer larger BTECs to their 14-16 students?

A: No. These changes have no impact on what schools can teach, only how qualifications are recognised in performance tables. You will still be able to select the right qualifications for each individual student's aspirations.

Since the headline measures (including '5 GCSEs at A*-C (or equivalent) including English and maths') will change from assessing volume of achievement to assessing breadth of achievement, these will report on 5 different subjects, meaning all qualifications will count as the equivalent of 1 GCSE, regardless of actual GLH size. Schools will continue to be able to deliver BTECs that are larger than a GCSE and up to two of these will be recognised as 1 GCSE equivalent. Whilst this '1 for 1' equivalence affects the headline performance measures, it does not affect the value of the qualification to the individual student for progression purposes.

Q: Will we be able to teach qualifications that aren't recognised in the headline measures?

A: Yes. These changes only affect how qualifications are recognised in the headline measures, not what can be taught in schools. Government is very clear that teachers should continue to deliver the qualifications that best suit the needs of their students, with the recent consultation response explicitly saying that, 'where it is in a student's best interest, schools are encouraged to teach qualifications not on the list'.

Qualifications can continue to deliver crucial skills, an enriched curriculum and recognition from employers and education institutes, regardless of whether they are recognised in headline measures or not. All achievements will continue to be published and reported in the wider performance tables.

Q: Will there be a limit on the number of vocational qualifications a student can take at Key Stage 4?

A: No. These changes only affect how qualifications are recognised in headline measures, not what can be taught in schools. Government is very clear that teachers should continue to deliver the qualifications that best suit the needs of their students.

Q: Will the smaller Edexcel qualifications stop being recognised in the 2014 headline measures?

A: To be recognised in the headline measures from 2014, qualifications have to be at least 120 GLH (equivalent to 1 GCSE) in size. Any qualifications smaller than this won't feature in the headline measures in the 2014 tables. They will continue to be reflected in the wider performance measures and those for an individual student.

Q: Will short-course GCSEs be recognised in the headline measures from 2014?

A: No. Short course GCSEs are only 60 GLH in size. To be recognised in the headline measures from 2014, qualifications have to be a minimum of 120 GLH (equivalent to 1 GCSE). They will continue to be reflected in the wider performance measures and those for an individual student.

Q: Will all of Edexcel's Level 2 vocational and skills qualifications be redeveloped so that they are recognised in the headline measures in future?

A: We are committed to working with our customers, Government and the regulator to explore ways that the development of crucial vocational and life skills can continue to be recognised. We do not think it appropriate that all of our qualifications are redeveloped to meet the characteristics necessary to contribute to the headline measure, but some qualifications certainly will be.

We will update you on the details of these qualifications as soon as they are finalised.

Q: How will Government be publishing the results of all qualifications taken at Key Stage 4 from 2014?

A: We don't know yet. As soon as we have more information about how Government will be making this information public, we will publish it on our website, www.btec.co.uk.

Q: Will functional skills be recognised in the headline measures from 2014?

A: No – functional skills are pass/fail qualifications that are 60 GLH in size. To be recognised in the headline measures from 2014, qualifications need be at least 120 GLH and be graded. Even though functional skills will not be recognised in the headline measures, their achievement will be recorded and published elsewhere in performance tables. Further to this, it is clear that functional skills still have an important role to play at Key Stage 4 - as a way to recognise smaller steps of achievement once the linear GCSEs are introduced, within foundation learning and for students progressing to apprenticeships.

To learn more about these changes and our new BTECs, [register for one of our SMT briefings](#), [BTEC Launch Events](#) or call our BTEC Helpline on 0844 576 0026