



PROGRESSION STATISTICS
PILOT – STAGE 2
Research Report

Prepared for Edexcel by

BASIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the overarching objective of establishing the 'value' delivered by BTEC First and National qualifications, stage 2 corroborated many of the insights garnered at the preceding stage. However, given the more detailed nature of the questionnaire employed, stage 2 also brought about a number of new insights.

Firstly, the stage 2 analysis identified prospectuses and teachers as being key information sources bringing BTEC qualifications to the attention of students. Whilst the vast majority maintained that they themselves had chosen a particular subject area, the role played by teachers was also acknowledged in this context, suggesting that this audience is of particular importance in terms of communicating the value of BTEC qualifications.

Secondly, the learning experience was explored and the widely held perception that BTEC learning differs from that delivered elsewhere identified. National Diploma learners were found to be most likely to harbour this view (79%), whereas in the case of First Diploma learners a smaller proportion perceived the BTEC learning experience to be different (54%). As for the exact nature of such differences, the more practical approach employed in BTEC learning was highlighted alongside the approach to learning based around coursework rather than exams. In the broader sense of the term, this indicates that BTEC qualifications deliver value for a learning audience less convinced by or suited for a more traditional approach.

Thirdly, the motivations for choosing BTEC qualifications and subject areas within the latter were queried, unveiling a considerable emphasis on a) interest in and aspiration to work within a given subject area and 2) future benefits in terms of career or further studies. Whilst these can both be described as medium to long term motivations, short term motivations were also queried, uncovering an overwhelming emphasis on obtaining qualifications needed for further studies. In other words, both short and longer term motivations drive the choice of BTEC qualifications, but interestingly the nature of BTEC learning features here too, with a considerable proportion of learners stressing as motivational factors the practical nature of BTEC qualifications, which many consider more suitable.

It is clear from the above, that BTEC qualifications constitute value in both a formal and an informal sense. With regards to the former, i.e. BTECs delivering formal value, which was also documented during stage 1, the subsequent stage largely corroborates this finding in as much as the proportion engaged in university studies and – to a lesser extent – employment increased from the pre-BTEC to the post-BTEC stage. Importantly, it is not viable to argue that BTEC qualifications caused these shifts over time, cf. the fact that about four in ten completed other qualifications alongside their BTEC, which may have impacted the observed progression, but it is nonetheless fair to argue that they are likely to have played a role in bringing about this outcome. However, in anticipation of this analytical challenge, the stage 2 questionnaire featured questions around the relevance and importance of the BTEC qualification obtained vis-à-vis the progression to further studies or employment and the finding here was that an overwhelming majority (75%) considered the BTEC relevant to their current studies / employment and a slightly smaller proportion of about 50% identified the BTEC as a formal requirement, without which a given job or place at college/university would not have materialised. Whether at the total level or within the First Diploma / National Diploma subgroups, less than 20%

stated that the recently completed BTEC had been somewhat or less important in bringing about the desired outcome. Providing further evidence of the value of BTEC qualifications in relation to current studies, the most widely recognised benefit of BTEC qualifications was found to be ‘provided me with skills that are vital for my current studies.’

With regards to sector areas within which progression occurs, stage 2 did little other than re-affirm that BTECs predominantly help bring about progression within the same sector area. The limited sample that progressed to employment did, however, provide an indication that progression in this context is less likely to happen within the same sector.

Lastly, as was also brought to light during stage 1, ‘softer’ aspects of progression were also documented during stage 2, which highlighted the large proportion of learners who considered completing the BTEC a ‘major achievement’ and a confidence boost. This was also reflected in the results produced by the opportunity learners were given to phrase the benefit of the BTEC in their own words. Here, one in three invoked social benefits such as boosted confidence and the opportunity to meet new people.

BACKGROUND

In 2008, Edexcel approached Basis with a request for a proposal for a study into the value delivered by BTEC First and National qualifications. Our response outlined two options for addressing this broad objective: 1) an approach based on progression data held by learning centres and 2) an approach based on primary research with learners.

Having initially explored option one, and established that relevant information is not consistently collected at the learning centre level, Edexcel asked Basis to draw up a more detailed account of the primary research approach. In the amended proposal, exploring option two, Basis made a number of assumptions in relation to availability of sample. However, it soon became clear that availability of information at the learning centre level would be a barrier here too.

In an effort to get around this, Edexcel initiated a recruitment drive for survey respondents, which involved distribution of flyers to about 40 colleges and schools throughout the country to advertise the survey and provide a URL where learners could register. This short recruitment survey, which remained in field from Friday 13th July through to Wednesday 30th September, was designed, programmed and hosted by Edexcel. In terms of content, the survey touched upon the following question areas:

- BTEC qualification completed
- Other qualifications completed alongside BTEC
- Next steps: further studies or employment
- Impact of BTEC qualification on preparedness for further study or work

Although this clearly touches upon the overarching objective of establishing the value delivered by BTEC First and National qualifications, the recruitment survey was first and foremost meant to serve as a vehicle for recruitment of respondents for subsequent telephone interviewing. However, given the relatively limited response to this recruitment drive, it became clear that the original target of telephone interviews (n=500) could not be achieved. Edexcel therefore asked Basis to, firstly, carry out stage 1, involving independent analysis and reporting on the raw data from the recruitment drive and, secondly, press ahead with stage 2 involving telephone interviews with the respondents who agreed to take part and volunteered relevant details.

With the output from stage 1 living separately, the report below takes as its point of departure the sample that was drawn during the preceding stage, exposing learners who agreed to participate in further research to a more extensive, in-depth questionnaire. Drawing upon insights garnered during stage 1, this more elaborate questionnaire was designed by Basis and fielded by Fieldworks between 3rd and 16th December 2009. To accommodate preferences expressed at the recruitment stage and to maximise the number of completed interviews, the fieldwork was carried out using a dual methodology approach involving telephone interviewing and a self-completion survey online. The recruitment drive yielded a total of 344 potential respondents, but it was always clear that the actual number of completes would decrease between the two stages. In the end, from the pool of 344 possible respondents, a total of 123 interviews were achieved, amounting to a decent conversion rate of slightly under three to one. After a data cleaning exercise, which eliminated just three respondents, it follows that the below analysis is based on a total sample of 119 respondents.

As was also pointed out in the stage 1 report, it is important to recognise that due to the relatively limited response to the recruitment drive, findings at both stages are not based on a sample that is representative of the universe of BTEC First / National Diploma learners. With that in mind, it is important to treat findings with due caution.

OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of the research has not changed since stage 1 and can be stated in simple terms as establishing the 'value' delivered by BTEC First and National qualifications. Here we would take 'value' to mean 'progression', but would stress that 1) learners can progress in different ways, e.g. to employment or to further studies, and 2) they may do so either as a direct or partial result of having completed their BTEC qualifications. On this basis, the overarching objective can be broken down further as follows:

- Do BTEC qualifications enable progression in terms of work?
 - Do learners progress within a field related to the subject matter of their BTEC?
- Do BTEC qualifications enable progression in terms of further studies?
 - Do learners progress within the subject matter of their BTEC?

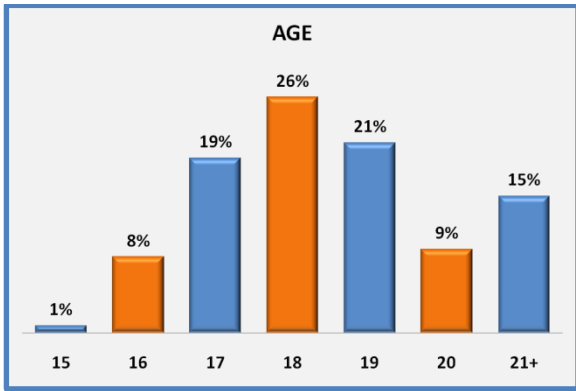
Whilst it is entirely valid to think about progression in the above terms, it is worth allowing for and keeping in mind the following when going forward:

- BTEC qualifications may have short-term vs. long-term effects (or both)
- A 'softer' dimension of progression may be relevant
 - Some might place more emphasis on progression in terms of achieving self-fulfilment rather than career progression
 - Having had ones confidence boosted within employment would certainly count as progression for some people, but this would not count as progression according to the 'hard' definition outline above

Before pressing ahead with the analysis, and in view of the fact that the sample is not representative of the universe of BTEC learners, it would be sensible to carry out a closer exploration of the sample profile. The section below therefore sets out to establish the make up of the sample that resulted from the stage 2 interviews.

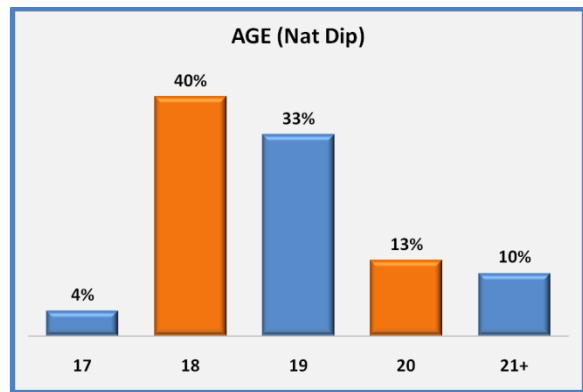
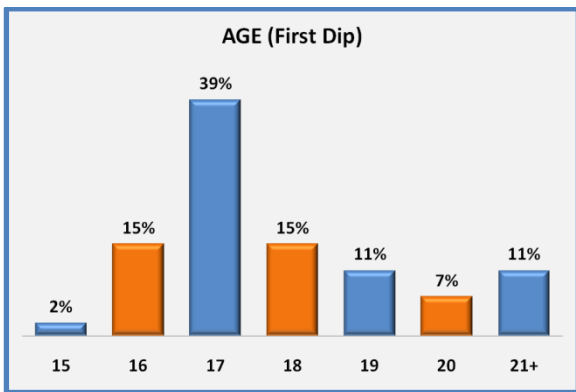
SAMPLE PROFILE

Whilst it would be fair to expect the profile of the stage 2 sample to be largely consistent with that drawn during stage 1, it is worth carrying out this brief profiling exercise to a) capture and reflect any shifts that may have occurred as a result of the drop off in the number of interview completes between the two stages and b) establish the extent to which sub-group analysis is feasible. In gender terms, stage 2 delivered a perfectly balanced 50/50 split and the age profile, perhaps unsurprisingly, remains centred on learners in their late teens (85% of stage 1 participants were college students), although nearly a quarter of interview completes was achieved with respondents aged 20+.



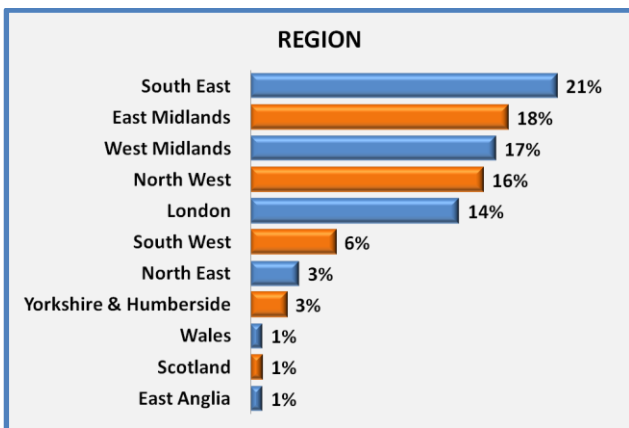
Base: all respondents (n=119)

As was the case at stage 1, the age profile of the two learner groups varies considerably, with the First Diploma subgroup being significantly skewed towards learners aged 17 and the National Diploma subgroup being predominantly made up of learners aged 18 or 19.



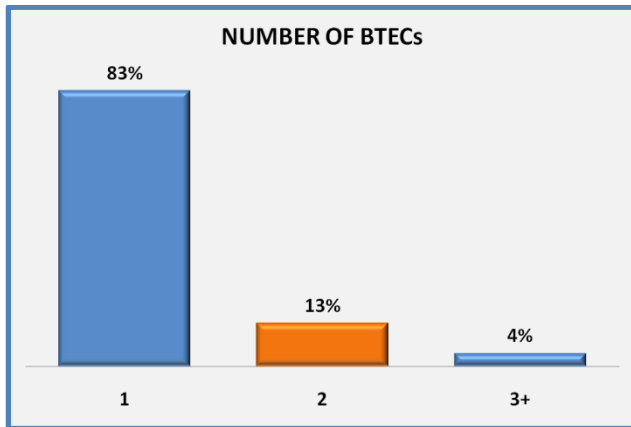
Base: all respondents who completed BTEC First Diploma (n=46) vs. BTEC National Diploma (n=48)

Region obviously reflects learning centre participation, which accounts for the relative over-representation of the South East (35% including London), the Midlands (35%) and to a lesser extent the North West relative to other regions.



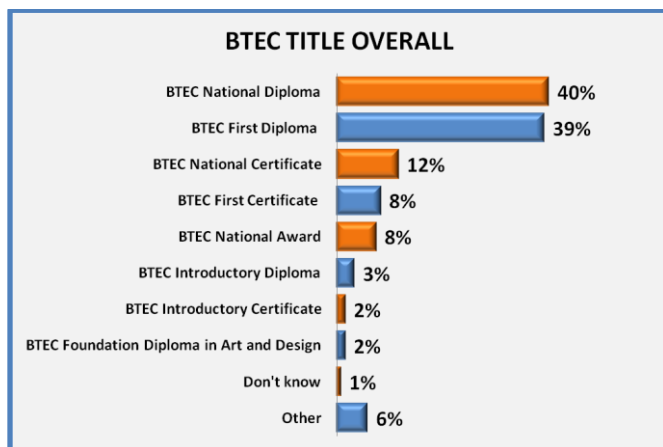
Base: all respondents (n=119)

Reflecting the prevailing trend of students completing one BTEC only – also identified at stage 1 – 83% of learners who participated in the stage 2 research studied one BTEC only. Again, it is important to note that this is reflective of the sample only and not the universe of BTEC First / National learners as a whole. From an analysis point of view, it is clear from this that a more detailed exploration of those who completed multiple BTEC qualifications is not viable due to limited sample size.



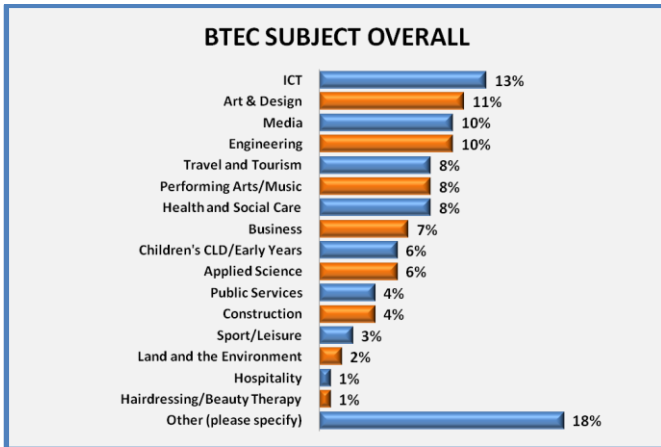
Base: all respondents (n=119)

Also reflecting the stage 1 findings, BTEC National Diploma and BTEC First Diploma learners dominate the stage 2 sample to such an extent that analysis within each of the groups is viable from a sample size point of view. However, it is important to note that due to the overall sample size, comparative analysis of the two groups is unlikely to yield differences that are statistically significant. As a result, although differences between the two groups will be highlighted at various points below, it is important to stress that these should be treated as indicative only.



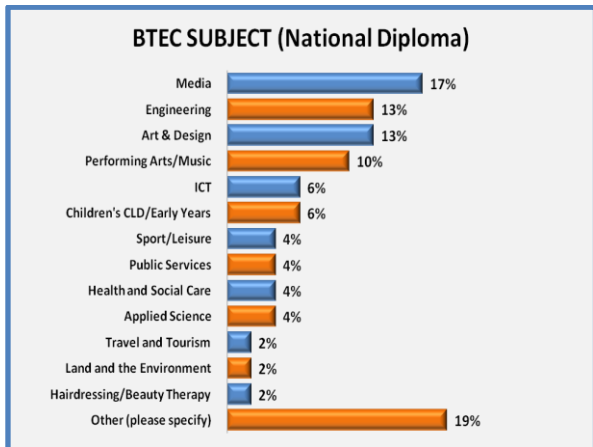
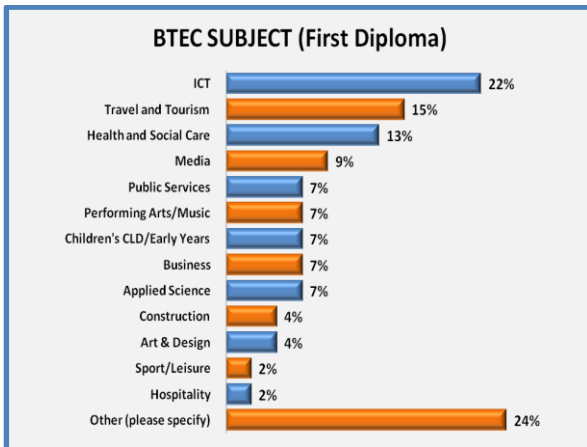
Base: all respondents (n=119)

Overall, BTECs were completed in a range of subjects, but with a net of 19% (art & design and performing arts/music combined), subjects within the arts appear most prominent together with ICT, media and engineering. Within the group of respondents that chose to specify other subjects, IT and animal care feature most prominently.



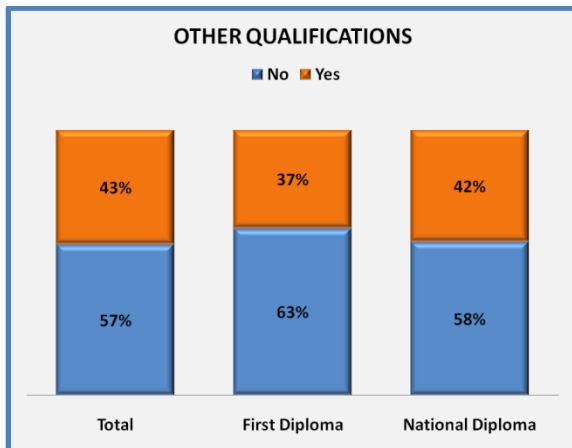
Base: all respondents (n=119)

Looking within subgroups, it is clear that the subject profile of First Diploma learners differs from that of National Diploma learners, with the prevailing subject within the former group being ICT, Travel & Tourism and Health and Social Care as opposed to Arts, Media and Engineering within the latter. Again, it is worth stipulating that this applies to the sample and not necessarily the universe of BTEC learners as a whole.



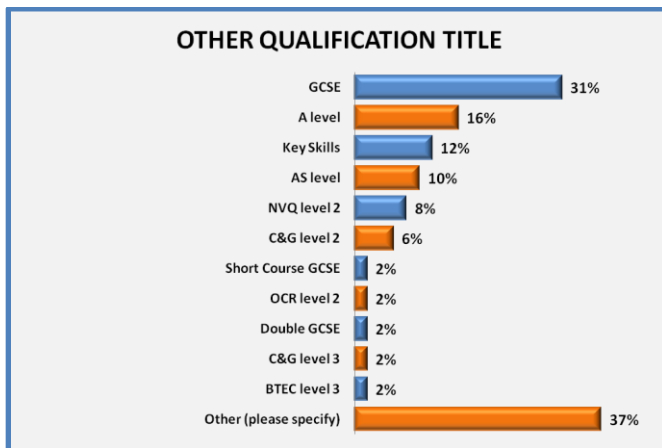
Base: all respondents who completed BTEC First Diploma (n=46) vs. BTEC National Diploma (n=48)

A relatively large proportion of 43% of the total sample indicated that they had completed other qualifications in conjunction with their BTEC. Whilst National Diploma learners are closer aligned with findings at the total level, this cannot be said to vary dramatically in comparison with First Diploma learners (difference of 5 % pts only).



Base: all respondents (n=119)

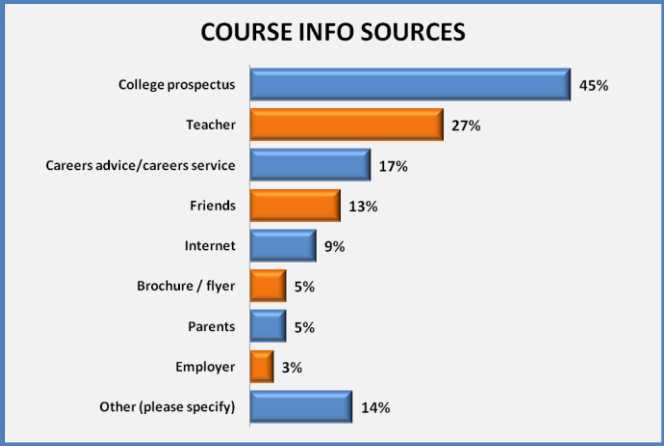
Leaving aside the large proportion who specified a broad variety of other qualifications in their own words, the largest proportion of learners who completed other qualifications in conjunction with the BTEC studies specified these as GCSEs. Sample size does not allow for robust analysis of this split at the level of sub-groups, but the clear indication is that the First Diploma subgroup accounts for the vast majority of students who completed GCSEs (predominantly in maths and English) in conjunction with their BTEC.



Base: all respondents who completed other qualifications (n=51)

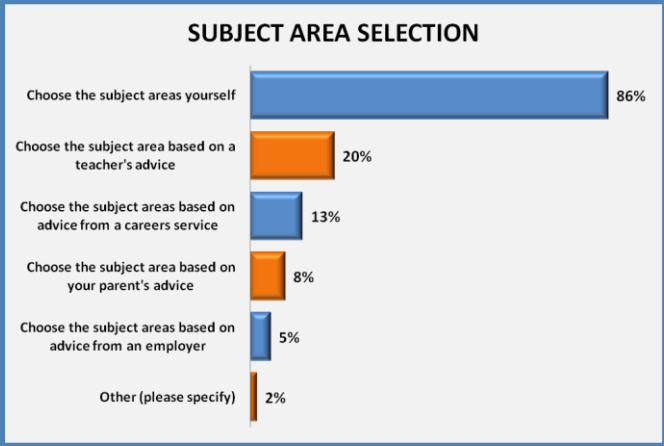
COURSE INFO SOURCES AND SELECTION

The stage 2 survey featured a question to gauge which information sources brought the BTEC to the attention of learners. Respondents were allowed to multi-code this question, which unveiled that learners to a large extent hear about the BTEC from college prospectuses and teachers. Aside from a slight skew towards reliance on teachers among First Diploma learners, this was not found to vary by subgroup.



Base: all respondents (n=119)

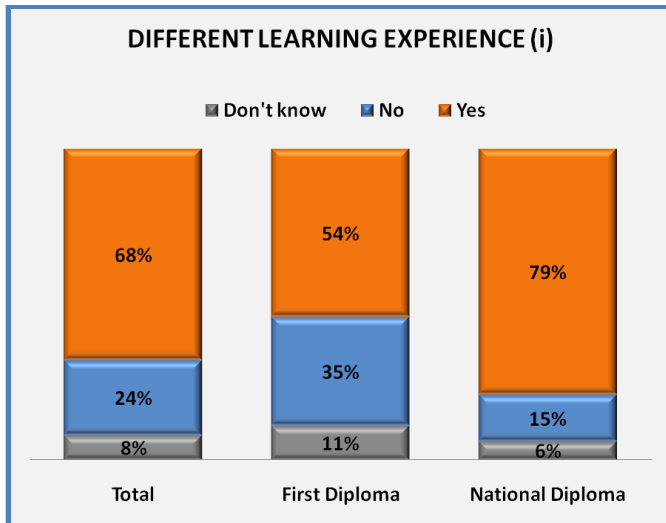
Stage 2 also explored the selection of BTEC subject area, which was overwhelmingly found to be arrived at autonomously, although one in five learners did acknowledge that a teacher’s advice had played a role in their decision. The selection of subject area was not found to vary by sub-group to any great extent.



Base: all respondents (n=119)

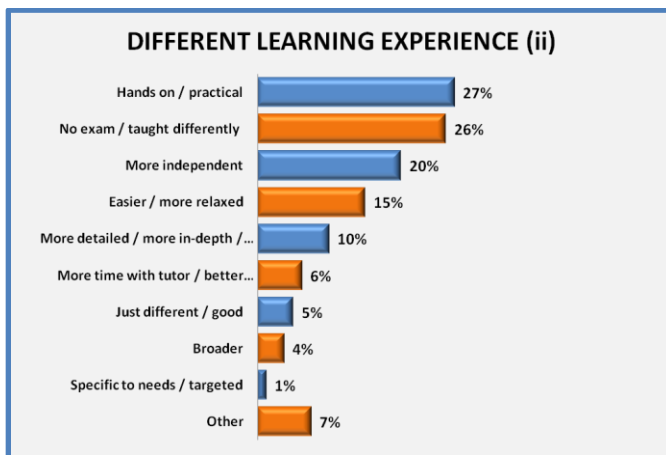
LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Upon being asked to compare the BTEC learning experience to that of other qualifications studied for, about two in three indicated that the BTEC had been taught differently. As can be seen below, this varied considerably by First Diploma and National Diploma learners, the latter being most likely to associate the BTEC with a different learning experience.



Base: all respondents (n=119), First Diploma learners (n=46) and National Diploma learners (n=48)

Respondents who perceived the BTEC learning experience to be different were asked to specify in their own words what exactly made the experience different. Answers were recorded verbatim and subsequently coded into categories, exposing three main differences relative to other qualifications: 1) differences to do with the more hands on / practical nature of BTEC studies, 2) differences based on what could broadly be described as teaching methods, i.e. emphasis on coursework over exams and 3) differences related to BTEC learning being a more independent experience. Please see below for examples of verbatim responses.



Base: all respondents who said the BTEC was a different learning experience (n=81)

VERBATIM RESPONSES – LEARNING EXPERIENCE:

Hands on / practical

“It was really different because it was more hands on than GCSE and we were trusted to use industry standard equipment.”

“It’s more practical in terms of the things you learn about. You have a closer relationship with your lecturers and it’s easier to go to them for help because they all worked in that field.”

“It suited me a lot better, it’s a lot more practical, there’s lots of performing music and it’s the thing I enjoy doing. There’s a wide variety of music covered, i.e. piano and guitar as well as singing.”

No exam / taught differently

“BTEC was taught different, the teaching of BTEC was fun and entertaining by using different tools, like for example using PowerPoint while teaching so that the teaching will not be boring.”

“In the course I chose, we were taught in various ways for example, role plays, theory and practical.”

“You have to work independently and have to motivate yourself to do the coursework. There are no exams, so you can concentrate on producing good coursework”

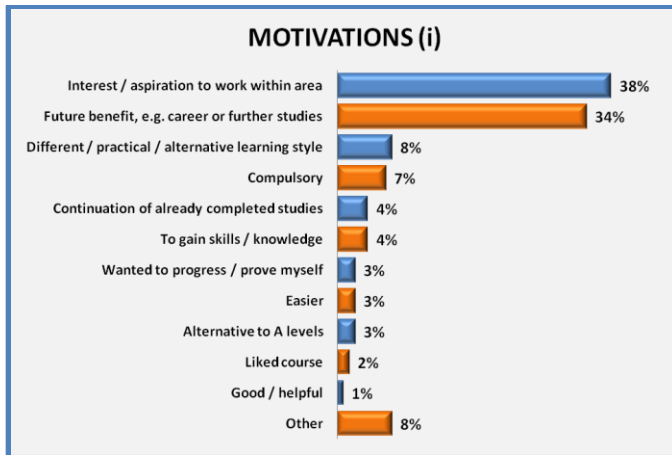
More independent

“There’s more independent learning, you are doing your own research on the internet and reading books.”

“Was far more freeing than regular qualifications. It gave us the choice of what we wanted to do in an assignment without being TOLD what to do. I think learning this way is much better, you learn your own way rather than a teacher’s.”

MOTIVATIONS

To avoid prompting respondents, motivations for choosing the BTEC were initially queried at the unaided level, i.e. respondents were allowed to put in their own words the factors that played a role in determining their choice. This approach did to some extent yield varied responses, but as can be seen below, motivations mostly converge around two themes: 1) an interest in or an aspiration to work within a particular subject area / field and 2) future benefits such as career or further studies. Again a number of illustrative verbatim examples are shown below.



Base: all respondents (n=119)

VERBATIM RESPONSES – MOTIVATIONS:

Interest / aspiration to work within area

“Well ... I just thought back to the subjects I enjoyed back in school, what I was best at, and wanting to learn more about subjects within Art and Design. So I decided that the course I just completed was the right one for me.”

“I’ve always had an interest in ICT since primary school and have always been good at it and by the time I finished my GCSE’s I decided to choose ICT as my choice of subject for further education and profession.”

“It’s something I have always wanted to do since I was little. The practical side suited me.”

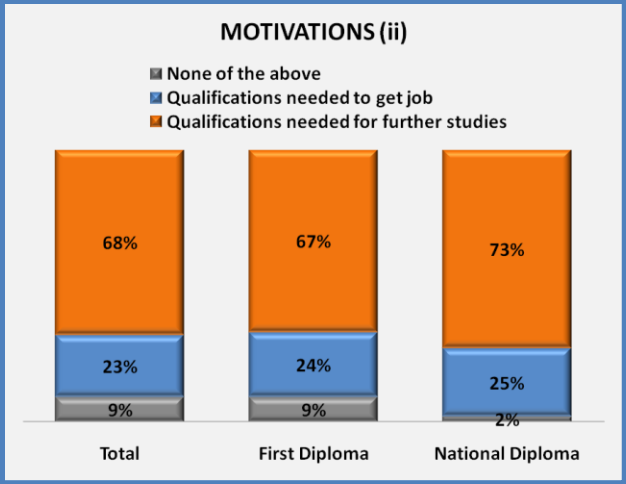
Future benefit, e.g. career or further studies

“It would help me gain employment within the sector I wish to be employed in.”

“The course would allow me to have a reasonable understanding of all the main areas of computers and afterwards I would specifically go into one area on the next course in uni.”

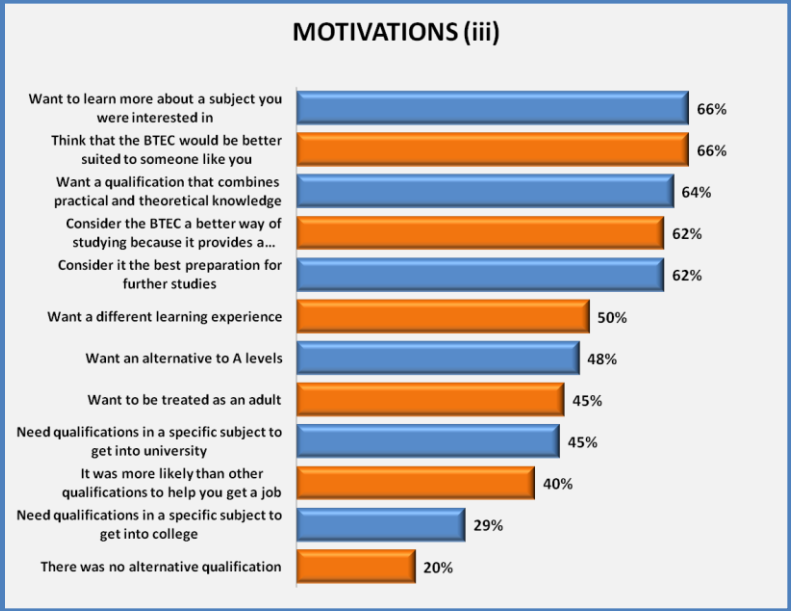
“I wanted to go into an education that was specific to a job and not just certain subjects.”

Following the open ended examination of motivations, respondents were asked whether in the short term their motivation for choosing the BTEC was mostly to do with obtaining qualifications needed in conjunction with a job or further studies. Here, little over two thirds indicated that they were motivated by a short term need for qualifications related to education. This was not found to vary considerably by sub-group, although a slight difference between First Diploma and National Diploma learners – the latter being slightly more skewed towards needing education related qualifications – was detected.



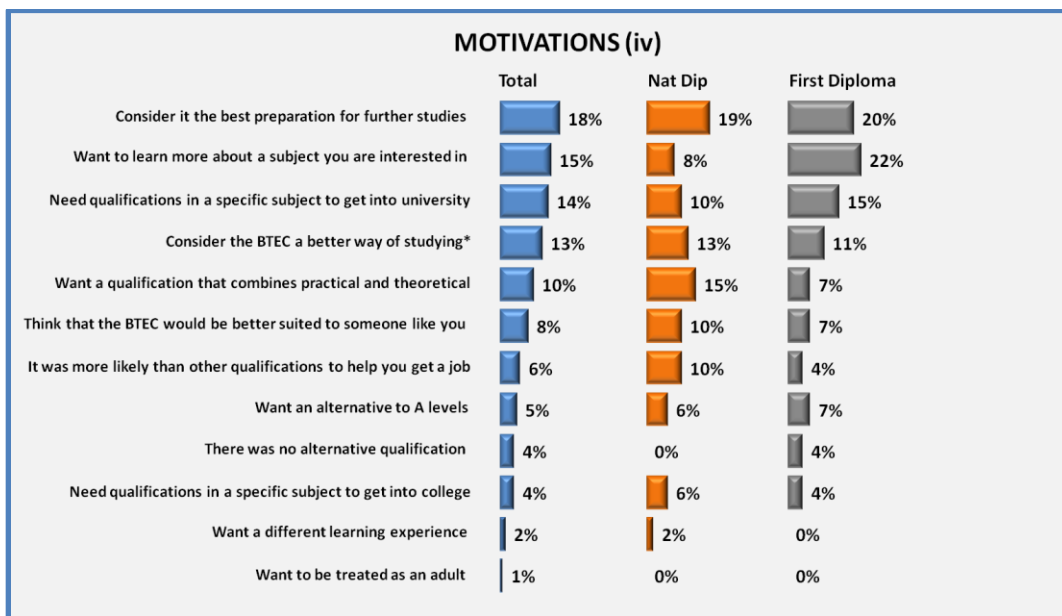
Base: all respondents (n=119), First Diploma learners (n=46) and National Diploma learners (n=48)

Further probing of the motivations behind the choice of BTEC qualifications at the aided level mirrors the considerable emphasis on interest and career benefits identified at the unaided level. However, whilst the unaided level can be said to query deeper rooted motivations (i.e. motivations that first spring to mind), the aided level serves to further illustrate and underscore the importance of BTEC qualifications being different in the specific sense of getting the balance between theory and practice right, cf. 1) the large proportion motivated by a qualification that combines practical and theoretical knowledge and 2) the similarly large proportion emphasising the BTEC as a better way of studying because it provides a practical, real-world approach to learning. That aside, about two in three indicated that they see the BTEC as the best preparation for further studies.



Base: all respondents (n=119)

To get a better read on key motivations behind the choice of BTEC qualifications, respondents who selected multiple 'drivers' were subsequently asked to specify which one motivated them the most. Results to a large extent mirror those identified above, but, interestingly, the need for a qualification in a specific subject to enable university studies ranks higher when learners are asked to choose one motivational driver only. Whilst the difference is not particularly marked, it is also interesting to note that First Diploma learners are more motivated by this than National Diploma learners. And in the case of wanting to learn more about a subject of interest to the learner, First Diploma learners are considerably more likely to see this as a key motivation for undertaking BTEC studies. Conversely, National Diploma learners appear more likely to emphasise the BTEC's combination of practical and theoretical knowledge and think that it suits someone like them better. Moreover, this learner group is slightly more likely to see the BTEC as helping them secure a job.



Base: all respondents (n=119), First Diploma learners (n=46) and National Diploma learners (n=48)

PRE TO POST-BTEC ACTIVITY & BENEFITS

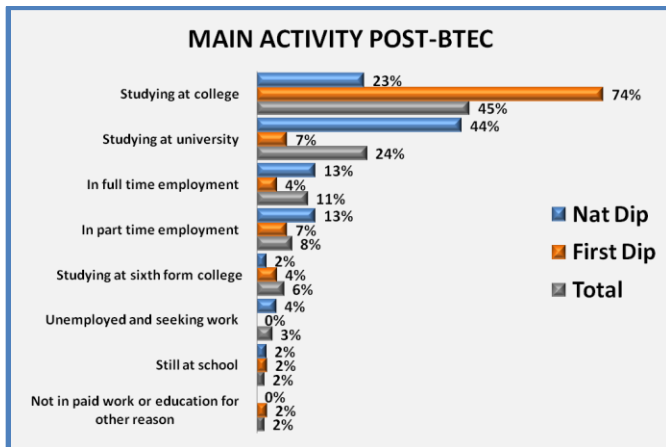
A straightforward comparison of activities pre and post BTEC studies provides an indication of the value BTEC qualifications deliver in terms of enabling learners to progress in the formal sense of moving from school to college, from college to university and from education to employment. Comparing proportions over time – see below – it is noticeable that the proportion of university students rose to 24% post-BTEC, the proportion of college students remained relatively stable (45% pre to 41% post), whereas the number of students still at school dropped, unsurprisingly, from 29% pre-BTEC to 2% post-BTEC. Perhaps more interestingly, the proportion of the total sample in either full time or part time employment rose from 12% pre-BTEC to 19% post-BTEC. Whilst it is important to keep in mind that a causal link cannot simply be drawn between the completion of BTEC qualifications and progression in this formal sense – after all other factors, including other qualifications may play a more or less significant role in bringing

about this outcome – it is fair to say that the growing proportions indicate that BTEC qualifications deliver value in the specific sense of progression.



Base: all respondents (n=119), First Diploma learners (n=46) and National Diploma learners (n=48)

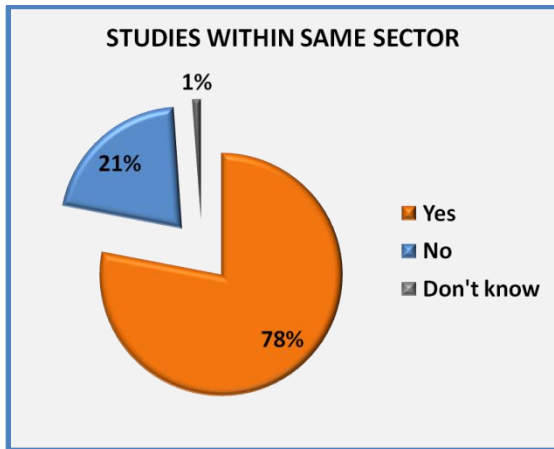
Looking within subgroups, the overwhelming majority of First Diploma learners progress to college studies, whereas National Diploma learners predominantly move onto studies at university level, although nearly one in four indicate that they are currently studying at college and another one in four indicate that they are currently in part time or full time employment.



Base: all respondents (n=119), First Diploma learners (n=46) and National Diploma learners (n=48)

Regardless of the level studied at, all respondents who indicated that they were currently studying were asked a follow up question to gauge the extent to which further studies are undertaken within a sector area similar to that studied during the BTEC learning experience. As can be seen below – and as expected given the considerable emphasis on interest as a motivational driver identified earlier – nearly eight in ten current students indicated that their studies was within the same sector area. Within the relatively small proportion that moved across sector areas when undertaking further studies, the majority invoked either a change of plan or the need for qualifications in other subject areas as an

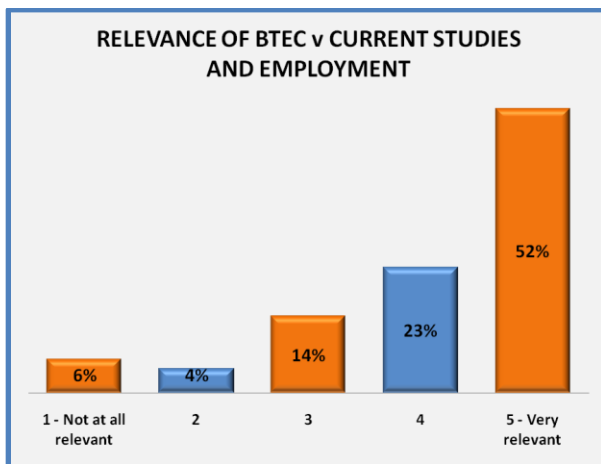
explanation for the change of heart. No significant variation in these findings was identified at the subgroup level.



Base: all respondents who are currently studying (n=91)

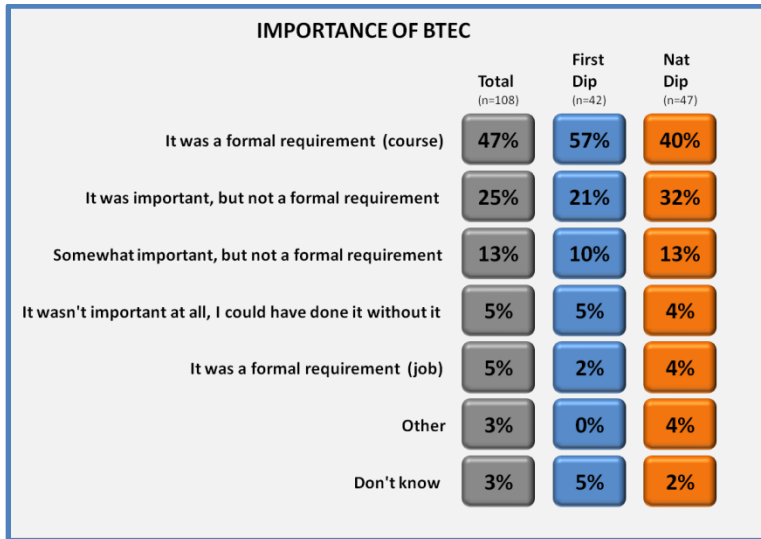
An exercise identical to the one described above was carried out for those, who indicated that they were currently working, to gauge whether jobs were achieved within the same sector area. Whilst the significantly smaller size of this group imposes restrictions in terms of the robustness of this finding – only 22 respondents fall into this group – the indication is nonetheless that a smaller proportion (55%) of learners achieves employment within the same sector area. This, of course, could well be affected by the present economic climate.

The survey also set out to assess the relevance of recently completed BTEC qualifications vis-à-vis current activities. Here the clear finding – as can be seen below – was that BTEC qualifications are overwhelmingly relevant to current activities. In fact three in four indicated that this was the case, whereas only a small proportion of 10% indicated that the BTEC was either not at all or not very relevant to their current activities.



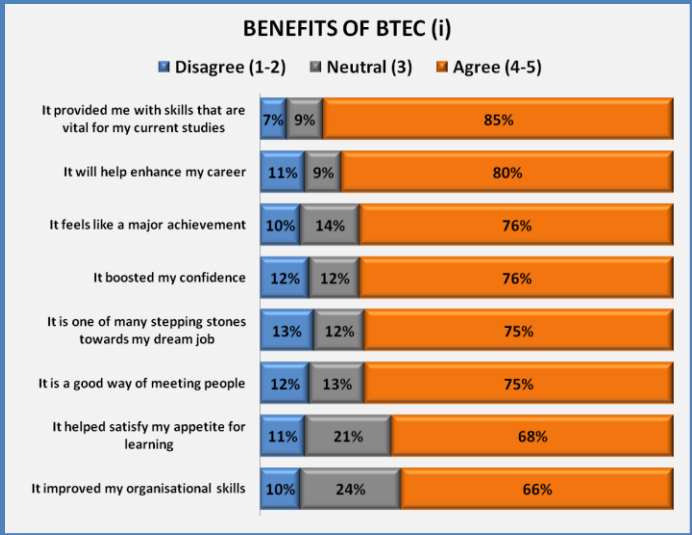
Base: all respondents who are working / studying (n=113)

Those who earlier identified the BTEC as a qualification needed to secure a job / further studies were subsequently asked to specify the importance of the BTEC in bringing about the desired outcome. At the total level, nearly half of those who qualified for this question answered that the BTEC was a formal requirement needed to qualify for a course (a considerably larger proportion of First Diploma learners gave this answer relative to National Diploma learners). More widely it is clear from the below that BTECs tend to play at least an important role in making learners achieve their desired outcome of progressing to a job or further studies.



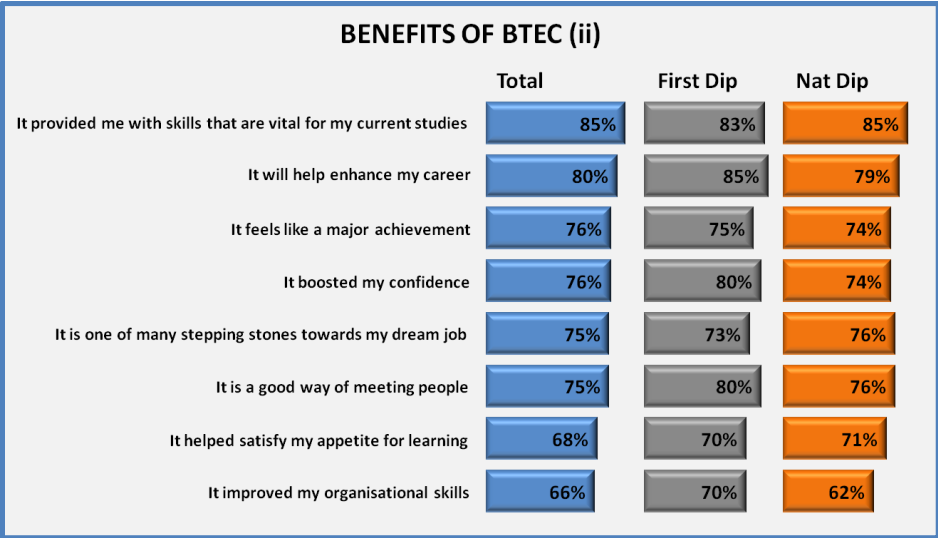
Base: all respondents who are currently studying or in employment (n=108)

Depending on whether respondents had gone onto employment or had progressed to further studies, follow up questions were employed to identify the benefits they had derived from their BTEC studies. For those who progressed to further studies, the vast majority agreed that the BTEC provided vital skills relative to their current studies. Within this group, the BTEC was also widely seen as a career enhancing move and was widely acknowledged as a confidence boosting achievement. On the other hand, a large proportion also recognised it as merely one stepping stone on the road towards a dream job.



Base: all respondents who are currently studying (n=91)

The two subgroups generally do not differ in terms of perceived benefits, although First Diploma learners are slightly more likely (6 % pts) to agree that the BTEC will help enhance their career and acknowledge that it boosted their confidence (6 % pts).

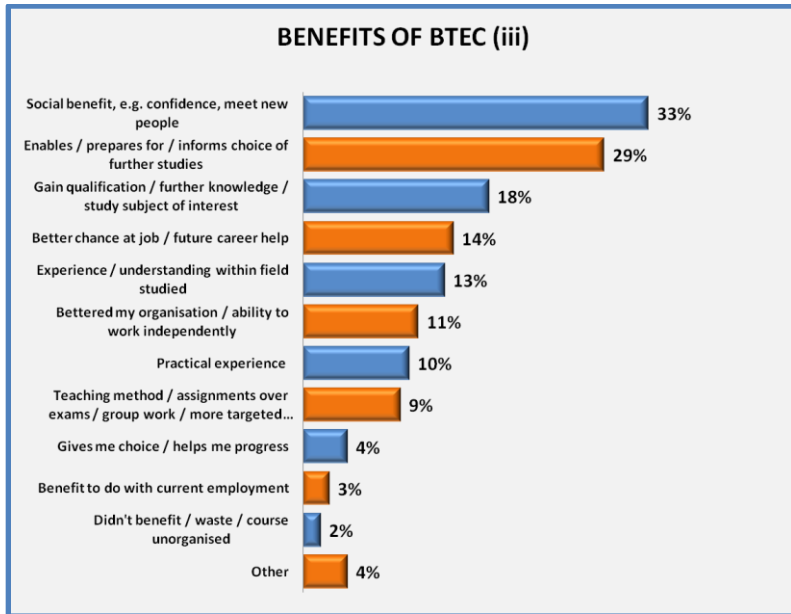


Base: all respondents who are currently studying (n=91)

The size of the group of learners who progressed to employment – 22 respondents in total – makes it difficult to draw robust conclusions about benefits derived, but indicatively it can be noted that the emphasis is on employment related benefits such as ‘help enhance career’, ‘provided with skills vital for job’ and ‘one of many stepping stones’.

The final question in the survey gave respondents the opportunity to put in their own words how the BTEC had benefited them. Again the verbatim responses were coded up into categories to reveal a very

significant emphasis on social benefits such as derived confidence and ability to meet people. The other major benefit identified at this unaided level was the enabling or preparatory role played by BTEC qualifications in relation to further studies (identified by nearly three in ten learners). For a slightly smaller proportion of learners (nearly two in ten), the major benefit was identified as the actual qualification or knowledge gained within an area of study of interest to the learner. Please see below for examples of verbatim responses.



Base: all respondents (n=119)

VERBATIM RESPONSES – BENEFITS:

Social benefit

“When I first started the course in September I was extremely shy and it took me a while to settle into the group as the year went on and I got used to the college environment and I have become more myself, I have made great friends who I am still in contact with even though we have all gone our different ways. I am more confident and outgoing than I used to be. It also helped me to decide the sector I would like my future career to be in and has given me a great deal of life experience.”

“After completing the BTEC, I was extremely happy with myself, I was able to achieve a triple distinction, which boosted my confidence so much. I felt I could go on to Study what I currently am, which is the Pre-degree in art and design, and if I hadn't got the grades which I did, I probably wouldn't have gone on to do it. The lecturers also gained my trust, and I felt as if they were family, they would help and support me whenever I felt I needed it.”

“I believe that it mainly boosted my confidence a lot due to the more 'independent' way of the course. And now this confidence is greatly helping with my new course in Uni to be able to talk to people better.”

Enables / prepares for further studies

“It has helped me prepare for university. It has given me confidence to achieve what I want and also motivated me to get the job that I want.”

“It gave me a really strong base for my studies in the university. It also gave me a better understanding on how life at work is (within a reasonable margin). It did complement me in many aspects, mainly academically. I am an international student and I am always going to thank my BTEC for giving me that vital strengths which many people at uni are missing (you can notice how they are now struggling).”

“It's more specified to a certain area/field, so all the subjects taught are relevant to what you want to do in the industry or at university.”

Gain qualification / further knowledge

“After completing the BTEC National Diploma in Art and Design, I thought that the benefits included; focusing on something you enjoy and taking it further, having a lot more knowledge within the Art and Design sector, learning new skills and techniques, being able to meet some great new people.”

“I have more chances of getting a job because I have more experience now than before and it improved my knowledge greatly.”

“It has been a big benefit because it has helped me gain a better understanding of how hard working the course is and how satisfying it is once finished.”