

## **Wolf Review of vocational education – Government response, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2011**

**On 12<sup>th</sup> May the Government published their response to the Wolf Review of vocational education. In it, Michael Gove is enthusiastic in his endorsement of vocational learning:**

*“This Government does not only support high quality vocational education for its utility; vocational education is valuable in its own right. It is part of the broad and balanced curriculum that every pupil should be able to enjoy”*

Michael Gove, Oral statement, May 12 2011

---

### **What does the Government response mean for BTEC provision in Schools?**

All BTECs remain deliverable and funded in schools, with no changes specified to the current recognition they receive in performance measures.

As Professor Wolf advocated, the Government has announced their intention to identify the best vocational qualifications for the 14-16 age group. They have stated that their preferred qualifications for this age group will **in the future**:

- Have rigorous assessment, including a percentage of external assessment.
- Provide good progression opportunities to Level 3
- Be in subjects which are recognized by employers and higher education
- Offer rigour, breadth and depth
- Be of an appropriate size to complement the academic core for the majority of students.

They will be carrying out a consultation over the summer in order to refine these attributes, and Pearson will be playing a full part in these consultations. The Government is committed to these quality vocational qualifications being recognized in performance tables alongside comparable academic qualifications.

BTECs consistently came in for praise and endorsement throughout the Wolf Report. Whilst no qualifications are singled out in the Government response, what is highlighted is that *‘there are excellent qualifications available providing clear routes for progression into full time employment or further study in higher education’*, attributes already demonstrated by the current BTEC qualifications. We are also working on a new generation of Level 2 BTEC qualifications for Schools which are planned for first teaching in 2012 (subject to accreditation) and all of which will contain an element of external assessment.

We are confident that BTECs meet the very high aspirations the Government has for vocational education with the recognition that learners deserve.

We will obviously continue to engage with Government throughout their consultation and would encourage you too to share your views. You can do so via our Facebook site [www.facebook.com/bigvocationaldebate](http://www.facebook.com/bigvocationaldebate) or by visiting [www.bigvocationaldebate.com](http://www.bigvocationaldebate.com). Alternatively, email us at [btec@btec.co.uk](mailto:btec@btec.co.uk)

### **Are you planning to make any changes to BTECs in the light of this announcement?**

We are always striving to improve BTECs and began discussions with our BTEC customers before Christmas to better understand how these qualifications can better meet the needs of today's learners, practitioners, universities and employers. You may have seen recent announcements about some of our proposed changes, and are working on a suite of BTEC Level 2 qualifications specifically tailored for delivery in schools that will be available for first teaching from September 2012. All these new Level 2 qualifications will have an element of external assessment. This will create more support for teachers and lecturers and demonstrates our continuing commitment to ensuring all students have access to the very best in vocational and academic education.

We have maintained a dialogue with Government throughout this period to ensure we are taking account of the changing vocational landscape, and we will continue to do so throughout the planned consultations they have announced today. The feedback we have had from you so far on our proposals has been invaluable and we would encourage you to keep sharing your thoughts on what good vocational education looks like, what you value about your current BTEC qualifications and any of the areas covered by the Response. Visit [www.facebook.com/bigvocationaldebate](http://www.facebook.com/bigvocationaldebate) ; [www.bigvocationaldebate.com](http://www.bigvocationaldebate.com) or email us at [btec@btec.co.uk](mailto:btec@btec.co.uk)

**Are there any changes proposed in the way vocational qualifications are recognized in school performance data?**

There are no changes announced to the recognition of vocational qualifications in school performance data in the Government's response.

What they do say is that *'we should clearly and simply recognize through performance tables those vocational qualifications which are most appropriate for the vast majority of 14-16 year olds'*.

The Government is keen to identify the best qualifications for this age group and state that their preferred qualifications will **in the future**:

- Have rigorous assessment, including a percentage of external assessment.
- Provide good progression opportunities to Level 3
- Be in subjects which are recognized by employers and higher education
- Offer rigour, breadth and depth
- Be of an appropriate size to complement the academic core for the majority of students.

Before any changes to the recognition of qualifications in performance measures are possible the Government consultation around preferred attributes for vocational qualifications must be completed and a review of current qualifications against these approved attributes carried out. This is currently scheduled to take place across the Summer and Autumn this year. With this in mind we do not expect any changes to the way vocational qualifications are recognized to come into force until Sept 2012 at the earliest.

We are working on a new generation of Level 2 BTEC qualifications for Schools which are planned for first teaching in 2012 (subject to accreditation) and all of which will contain an element of external assessment.

**Is the Government mandating any changes that we need to take account of in our September 2011 BTEC provision?**

No. There is nothing in the Response requiring you to make any changes to your BTEC or broader curriculum provision from September 2011. The Government has set out a timetable for consultation on a number of areas (add in timetable) but it is clear that the consultation periods will not complete in time for a September 2011 implementation.

This means that your current provision can remain unaffected for September 2011, without disadvantaging your learners.

**Has the Government made any recommendations about the number of vocational qualifications an individual 14-16 learner may take?**

No.

There is an expression of the desire for the *'vast majority of 14-16 year olds to be taught an academic core, which can then be supplemented by a vocational element'* but no prescription is given as to the size of that vocational element. We are encouraged that the Government agrees

that schools and colleges should be free to choose whatever qualifications they identify as most appropriate for an individual student and that will enable them to progress.

*'Students should choose the qualifications they need to succeed, not those which bureaucracies deem appropriate'*

Michael Gove, Oral statement, May 12 2011

They have signaled that they are looking to identify the best vocational qualifications for the 14-16 age group and commit to the fact that once this identification process is complete all these qualifications should be clearly and simply recognized through the performance tables. No limit has been articulated around the number of vocational qualifications that will be recognized in this way either.

### **Is the Government recommending any restrictions on the amount of curriculum time that can be spent on vocational study by 14-16 year olds?**

No. The Response states several times that young people must take the qualifications that are right for them, and that it is important that schools and colleges are free to choose whatever qualifications they identify as most appropriate for their individual students.

The focus needs to be on a broad and balanced curriculum, which the Government wants to be an academic core supplemented by a vocational element for the majority of students. However they acknowledge that the priority is for students to be able to take the qualifications that best meet their individual needs and no curriculum time is specified.

This means that you should continue to feel confident in the choices you have made for your students and need make no changes as a result of this Government response.

### **How has the Government responded to Professor Wolf's recommendations around maths and English qualifications, post-16.**

There is a strong desire that *'All young people must leave school or college with good English and Maths skills'* highlighting their importance in progression to further and higher education and to employment. The Government have asked Ofqual to consider how to reform GCSEs (for example looking at how to reduce modularization and re-sitting) and there will be a separate summer consultation around this reform.

GCSE remains the qualification of choice for post-16 math and English. For young people who are not immediately able to achieve a GCSE the Government is looking to identify high quality English and Maths qualifications that will enable progression to GCSE and will consult on this over the summer and autumn. We will be reviewing our portfolio in this area to ensure we effectively meet the needs of post 16 learners.

### **What does the Response say about the future of Functional Skills?**

There is clear support in the Response for Functional Skills within Apprenticeships and a repeat of the intention to phase out Key Skills.

Functional Skills have, from the outset, been developed to sit alongside GCSEs. They are challenging, worthwhile qualifications that have a strong role to play in the Government's ambitions to prepare students appropriately for progression into employment and as such we believe they will continue.

### **What does the Government response say about Apprenticeships?**

The Government are emphatic in proclaiming Apprenticeships as the best way to learn in work and are as highly sought after and regarded as places at the most prestigious universities, and state their aim is to ensure that all Apprenticeships are *'as good as the best'*

We are pleased to see that some of the employers that deliver our BTEC Apprenticeships have been recognized in the review and we will continue to ensure that all of our BTEC Apprenticeships are as good as the best. Like the Government, we appreciate the need to focus on 16-18 provision and look forward to working closely with them and delivery partners in shaping proposals for Autumn 2011. We are keen to hear any thoughts you might have on whether and how this 16-18 provision should be adapted or supplemented so please do visit [www.bigvocationaldebate.com](http://www.bigvocationaldebate.com) to share your views or email us at [btecapprnticeships@pearson.com](mailto:btecapprnticeships@pearson.com).

The Response also talks of the intention to undertake a review to ensure transparency of all Apprenticeship funding, which we also agree is key. However it's important that the Government involves all stakeholders to fully understand this complex delivery model.