

Government Statement of Intent on School and College Performance Tables

July 20th, 2011

Background

The Department for Education has just announced that vocational qualifications – including the current suite of BTECs – will continue to be recognized in school league tables for the next two years at their current equivalencies. The news comes as part of the Government's latest update on league tables for 2011, published on 20th July, which also starts a wider consultation on how vocational qualifications should be recognised. This is a welcome announcement giving much needed clarity on the short-term position and an ongoing commitment to the recognition of good quality vocational qualifications in performance measures. It also recognizes that a balanced curriculum of both academic and vocational study should be available to all students.

The following Questions and Answers have been compiled to support you in understanding what this latest news might mean for you and your learners. They are also putting our new BTEC 2012 qualifications into the context of these latest developments. Inevitably, as this consultation has just begun, there are some areas which we don't have answers for just at the moment, but we will update you again as soon as further information is available.

What is covered by this announcement?

In respect of vocational education, this announcement confirms the position for performance table recognition for those qualifications started in September 2011. In addition it is also launching a consultation around the criteria to determine good quality vocational qualifications and proposing how these newly classified qualifications will be recognized in performance tables published from 2014 onwards (i.e. affecting 2-year programmes started from 2012).

The consultation is open until September 30th 2011 and we understand it is expected to report back in early November.

Will the achievements of 14-16 learners starting BTEC qualifications in September 2011 be recognized in performance tables?

Yes. The Statement of Intent confirms that all vocational qualifications started in September 2011 (and therefore completing in 2012 or 2013) will be recognized on their current equivalencies. This means that learners starting 2-year BTEC Level 2 programmes in September 2011 will achieve the current recognition in performance tables on completion – either in 2012 or 2013. We know however, that some schools opt to start teaching BTECs in Year 9 over a 3-year programme and we are currently seeking clarity from the Department for Education around this. We will keep you updated.

Will the new BTECs planned for September 2012 first teaching meet the new criteria?

In response to the Wolf Report and feedback from teachers, schools and colleges we have already started to develop the next generation of our BTEC qualifications, introducing elements of external assessment and working closely with universities and industry to devise their content. In the light of this announcement we are also now considering what a synoptic assessment might look like for each of these new Level 2 qualifications. BTECs are well-established, high quality qualifications and our engagement with the Government throughout this formative period for vocational education in schools will ensure that the new BTECs match the new criteria set.

Note: The Phase 1 New BTEC Level 2 subjects (subject to accreditation, available for first teaching September 2012) are: Applied Science, Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, IT, Performing Arts, Sport.

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What about the BTEC Level 2 subjects not being re-developed for September 2012? Will they continue to get points or count towards the 5A*-C measure?

We are planning to develop new versions of the remaining BTEC subjects in the Phase 2 delivery for September 2013 first teaching (subject to accreditation). The 2010 (QCF) versions will still be available for students starting programmes in 2012, however under the proposals laid out in the Statement of Intent these would not qualify for performance table recognition on completion in 2014. We are consulting with the DfE to gain further clarification around this issue and will keep you updated.

Whilst the 5A*-C measure has been confirmed as the main measure for school performance in this Statement, it is clear that the government is looking to use a number of performance measures going forward. This includes the English Baccalaureate, and a number of Value Added measures for Key Stage 4 which will be based on learner's 'best eight' results. The details of how these measures will be calculated has yet to be determined; however we would certainly expect the 2010 (QCF) Level 2 BTECs to be recognized within these additional measures.

Note: The Phase 1 New BTEC Level 2 subjects (subject to accreditation, available for first teaching September 2012) are: Applied Science, Art & Design, Business, Health & Social Care, IT, Performing Arts, Sport.

The Statement is proposing that 'one qualification will be treated as 'one' in the tables', regardless of size. Does this mean schools can't offer larger BTECs to their 14-16 students?

No it doesn't. However it does mean that whether a student is taking a one, two or three-GCSE 'sized' BTEC, they will all be recognized as equivalent to **one** GCSE. Whilst still only a proposal, this is encouraging news, as it demonstrates the government's commitment to recognising vocational qualifications within the key 5A*-C measure. We are also aware that the starting point for much of your curriculum planning is the particular needs of your individual students and of course, this new information shouldn't impact on your ability to choose whatever qualifications (of whatever size) best suits their needs.

It is also worth highlighting that the 'one-to-one' proposal would only affect the 5A*-C measure. What is clear in this Statement of Intent is that the government will be introducing a number of additional measures, including a 'Best 8 qualifications' measure, where we would expect these larger BTECs to be fully recognized.

Does the proposal limit the number of vocational qualifications a 14-16 learner can study for?

No it doesn't. However it does suggest a limit to the number of 'non-GCSE' qualifications that will be recognized in the 5A*-C measure and sets this limit as two. This clearly supports the importance of vocational education in offering a balanced curriculum for all students. We understand that for many of you the important factor is to be able to make the curriculum planning decisions that support the needs of all your individual students and this condition for the 5A*-C measure doesn't need to impact on that; indeed other performance measures such as the 'Best 8 qualifications' measure are designed to recognise and reflect this.

What constitutes a 'substantial proportion of external assessment'?

This is something the consultation will aim to establish. As you may be aware the BTEC 2012 proposals suggest an appropriate proportion of the qualification will be externally assessed depending on the qualification's overall size. Our priority is to ensure that the qualifications we deliver for 2012 meet the Government criteria so you can introduce them with confidence, and so we will continue to consult with them on this and will keep you updated.

We have already had a lot of feedback from existing BTEC centres about what this new element of a BTEC will look like and you have told us that you are keen to preserve the unique attributes that BTECs offer learners. We would like to reassure you that:

- We have consulted extensively with existing BTEC customers to understand what they and their learners value in their BTEC provision.
- The external assessment will be entirely appropriate to the individual subjects (test, task, performance) and where possible will be taken when ready rather than all loaded to a final exam.
- We strongly believe that teachers are in the best place to provide accurate assessment of their students' achievements, and this will remain the key way in which all BTECs will be assessed.

Will all vocational qualifications need to be graded A*-G going forward?

No, this is not the case. The detail of the announcement clearly states that Pass, Merit and Distinction remains a valid grading system.