

Wolf Review of vocational education – Government response May 12th 2011

FAQs for FE Colleges

On 12th 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 Colleges?

The existing suites of BTEC qualifications remain deliverable and funded in colleges.

BTECs consistently came in for praise and endorsement throughout the Wolf Report, and, while the Government hasn't singled out any qualifications in their Response, they highlighted that:

‘there are excellent qualifications available providing clear routes for progression into full time employment or further study in higher education’

attributes which the current suite of BTEC qualifications already demonstrate.

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 or by visiting www.bigvocationaldebate.com. Alternatively, email us at 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 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. As part of our ongoing commitment to maintaining the highest standards in vocational learning, we are working on a suite of BTEC Level 2 qualifications specifically tailored for schools delivery available for first teaching from September 2012. All these new Level 2 qualifications will have an element of external assessment and will create more tailored support for teachers and tutors.

We have maintained a dialogue with Government throughout this period to ensure we take account of the changing vocational landscape, and we will continue to do so throughout the planned consultations announced in the Response.

Your feedback on our proposals so far 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 ; www.bigvocationaldebate.com or email us at btec@btec.co.uk.

Is the Government mandating any changes we need to take into account for 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, 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.

How – and when – will funding change for 16+ learners?

The Government has endorsed Professor Wolf's recommendations and will carry out a review of the 16-19 funding formula. The Response confirms:

"[We] will consider how we can move from a formula based on funding qualifications to one based on funding learners."

They will carry out this review over the summer 2011 and we will be engaging with the Government during this process.

They have also committed to extend full Government funding for level 2 courses in maths and English to 19-24 year olds who have yet to achieve at this level.

For more help on funding questions, visit: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/2010-funding-faq.aspx>

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 has 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 Government's 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 also believe there is value in English and maths qualifications specifically designed to lead to employment, and are looking to develop our Functional Skills offer – and potentially other qualifications – in this area.

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 and Key Skills?

There is clear support in the Response for Functional Skills within Apprenticeships and a repeat of the intention to phase out Key Skills by September 2012.

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 Response say about the future of Foundation Learning?

The Government has initiated a review of Foundation Learning provision. The Response expresses concern that:

"foundation learning which presently shapes much of what is taught is too rigidly structured and qualifications driven. We need to understand better what makes a difference, and build on the best examples."

Their initial evaluation is due to report in June 2011, with a full evaluation and recommendations scheduled for December 2011.

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 to share your views or email us at 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.

Can QTLS holders can now teach in schools?

The Response has confirmed Professor Wolf's recommendation to recognize QTLS status in schools.

This will require legislation and the Government will make a statement over the summer to confirm how and when any changes will come into force. They do not specify a timeframe, as any change is subject to parliamentary procedure, although *"we intend to implement this recommendation as soon as possible"*.

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 learners and need make no changes as a result of this Government response.

Can colleges offer the QCF BTEC Level 2 First qualifications to their 14-16 learners?

You do not need to make any changes to your curriculum offer for September 2011.

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.

The Government will carry out a consultation around preferred attributes for vocational qualifications and review the current suite of qualifications against these attributes. They have scheduled this consultation across summer and autumn 2011, so it seems likely that any changes to vocational qualifications for 14-16s in schools would come into force for first teaching in September 2012 at the earliest.

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

We will continue to engage with colleges and schools as part of the development process for our BTEC qualifications, and to engage with Government during the consultation process. We would encourage you to share your views via our Facebook site www.facebook.com/bigvocationaldebate or by visiting www.bigvocationaldebate.com. Alternatively, you can email us at btec@btec.co.uk.