

The Wolf Report: Frequently Asked Questions

What does the Wolf Report say about BTECs?

BTECs consistently come in for praise and endorsement throughout the report, particularly at Level 3, and are singled out on several occasions for the degree to which they aid progression both to university and employment.

This view is supported by the independent research used by the Review team, which demonstrates that BTEC is already performing well against the criteria that Professor Wolf suggests should be used to define good quality vocational education.

This is not the case with all vocational qualifications, and indeed Professor Wolf points out that there is also poor quality provision taking place that limits future opportunities for students. There is no link between this and BTECs, but we do not take this for granted and will continue to work with our customers and government to further improve our vocational offering.

What does the Wolf Report say about the role of vocational education in schools?

The Wolf Report gives a positive and explicit endorsement of the validity of good vocational education both pre- and post-16, and in her Executive Summary Professor Alison Wolf states:

“Good vocational programmes are... respected, valuable and an important part of our, and any other country’s, educational provision.”

The Report recognises that there is a lot of high-quality vocational provision already occurring in schools and that these examples should be highlighted and built upon for the future. High quality is typified by progression into employment or further study.

The independent research – used by the Review team – demonstrates that the BTEC suite already performs extremely well against the criteria that Professor Wolf suggests, and we will continue to work with the government as these criteria are further developed.

Professor Wolf does point out that there is also poor quality provision taking place that limits future opportunities for students. There is no link between this and BTECs, but we do not take this for granted and will continue to work with our customers and government to further improve our vocational offering.

What does the Wolf Report say about vocational education and school performance data?

This is a key topic in the report, but no definitive changes have been announced. It acknowledges that any changes are complex and require careful consideration and this has been accepted by the DfE. However, there are a number of things that we do know now:

The current core performance measure in schools remains the five A*-C GCSEs (including Maths and English) or equivalents

Most importantly, good quality vocational education will continue to be included in any future performance measures

There is a suggestion that non-GCSE awards could be limited in their allowable contribution:

“One possibility might be to set a maximum (e.g. 25%) to the number of points that can be contributed by non-GCSE awards, while at the same time limiting the number of formal examinations whose points can be averaged and used.”

We believe that this figure may be too low to recognise and reward the achievements of many students – especially if the quality of provision has been reviewed and secured. We would be interested to hear your thoughts on this. Please do share them at [Facebook.com/BigVocationalDebate](https://www.facebook.com/BigVocationalDebate).

No timescale has been given for any changes in this area and careful consideration will need to be given to the potential impact on current students. We will continue to engage with government around this issue of school performance tables and will keep you updated on any developments.

What should we do for September 2011?

The report is emphatic that schools are in the best position to decide on the best approach for their students. There is no imperative to make hasty decisions that may disadvantage your current students.

Our extensive research with schools has shown that the vast majority want to provide the right qualifications for the right students. For many, this means no immediate change. Where they do want to adjust their provision (focusing more on EBacc subjects or implementing more BTECs), we are here to help. We are offering support in a number of areas, including face-to-face curriculum consultation events across the country and also the opportunity to book one-on-one meetings with one of our Curriculum Development Consultants. Please contact us as above and let us know how we can help you.

What does the Report say about the role of external assessment within vocational qualifications?

The first thing you need to know is that the Report is not making any recommendations for the blanket introduction of exams into the assessment process for vocational qualifications. Indeed, while acknowledging that “clearly established and properly monitored national standards” are essential, Professor Wolf goes on to say, “[t]his need not, and indeed should not, mean assessment entirely on the basis of examinations, which in the case of vocational awards will often be quite inappropriate.”

What is clear is that any change to the role of assessment within the current vocational qualifications represents a significant development needing deep and widespread consultation with the industry. We will ensure that we are closely involved in that consultation and would welcome your views on this too.

Do the recommendations carry any implications for my BTEC Applied Science provision?

Professor Wolf stresses that Science was outside the remit of her Review, and will be encompassed by the National Curriculum Review which is currently underway. We know that BTEC Applied Science has become a valuable approach for thousands of students and offers a valid progression route through to A level Applied Science.

What is the impact of the Wolf Review on the funding of 14-19 learners?

The report recommends a significant simplification of the processes and bureaucracies surrounding funding, changing focus from the qualification to the student. However, no indication has been given as to the timetable for this change. The implications for funding are not always clear and direct, and of course we have no detail as to how any of the 27 recommendations would be implemented – essential for understanding the funding implications. Precise impacts are therefore impossible to determine without further policy development, but some of the key headlines on funding are summarised in the paper *What does the 14-19 Wolf Report have to say about funding?*.

What are the implications of the Wolf Review for the delivery of vocational education post-16?

There is a strong endorsement in the report of the value of good quality vocational qualifications - and BTECs in particular - post-16:

"BTEC level 3 awards... are [also] well-recognised by higher education and widely accepted for entry onto degree courses" (Wolf Review, p.50)

"BTEC National Diplomas are [also] valuable in the labour market, and a familiar and acknowledged route into higher education" (Wolf Review, p.33)

The report contains a further recommendation that 16- to 19-year-olds should not follow 'entirely occupational' qualifications (i.e. those that do not go beyond the content of the National Occupational Standards), or those that do not offer progression to higher levels of education or employment:

Unlike NVOs – which are purely skills and competence-based - BTEC Nationals incorporate underpinning knowledge and understanding; they have been proven over many years to engender in their learners the broader knowledge and understanding required by universities and employers

Over 92,000 BTEC learners were accepted into UK universities in 09/10 (source: HESA)

Over a quarter of all BTEC National learners progress into employment (source: BTEC Progression research, BASIS, Mar-11)

61% of employers recruit BTEC learners (source: YouGov poll, Feb-11)

There is a strong emphasis in the report on the importance of English and maths, and a recommendation that post-16 learners who do not have GCSEs at A* to C in these subjects continue to pursue a course which either leads directly to, or provides significant progress towards, these qualifications. It is anticipated that this will be further reviewed within the National Curriculum Review that is currently underway.

How does the 14-19 Diploma fit into this view of vocational education?

The Wolf Report does not make any specific recommendations about the 14-19 Diploma. Edexcel is pleased to have secured the position of Diploma provider of choice among schools and colleges; we will continue to offer the Diploma, and to support our Diploma centres, teachers and learners in their Diploma delivery. For guidance on how to manage Diploma provision, centres are advised to contact us on 0844 576 0026 to arrange a curriculum planning visit from one of our consultants.

Is it true that the report says that the number of vocational qualifications any individual KS4 student can take are going to be limited?

In her report, Professor Wolf stresses that, for pre-16 learners, schools should only be encouraged to offer high quality qualifications: 'Only those qualifications – both vocational and academic – that meet stringent quality criteria should form part of the performance management regime for schools' (p11)

She proposes a 'large common core' of qualifications that meet these new criteria, utilising 80% of the timetable, with schools free to offer whatever qualifications they wish from regulated awarding bodies for the remaining 20%. We are working with the Government on defining criteria for inclusion in the core, and anticipate that this will include both vocational and academic qualifications.

Professor Wolf also mentions the possibility of setting a limit ('eg 25%') on the number of points that can be contributed by non-GCSE awards. We believe that a points cap of this kind would not achieve the desired outcomes, and would risk creating new perverse incentives of the type Professor Wolf wishes to avoid. In practical terms, a cap would also be difficult to administer. We are working with the Government on defining alternative and more effective ways of achieving a balanced and appropriate curriculum for all learners.

We fully support that students have an entitlement to high-quality vocational provision and if this is clearly defined and monitored then there should be no need to limit the number of qualifications that a student can take – this should be determined by the needs of the student. What is important is that a student's achievement in all qualifications should be recognised and rewarded appropriately – regardless of whether they are vocational or academic qualifications.

This is an important issue that still needs to be resolved and we are continuing to work closely with government in determining what constitutes 'good vocational provision' and to ensure that all vocational students' achievements are appropriately rewarded. We would welcome your views and thoughts on this issue – please visit www.facebook.com/bigvocationaldebate to let us know what you think.

What should I be doing with my BTEC Applied Science Learners?

We understand that you may be currently planning your curriculum provision for September 2011 and would encourage you to base your decisions on the individual needs of your students. The 5 A*-C measure is



still regarded by many as the main performance measure for schools, and – like all Level 2 BTECs - BTEC Applied Science is included within that measure as normal.

The Wolf Review is emphatic that schools are in the best position to decide on the best approach for their students. There is no imperative to make hasty decisions that may disadvantage your current students. Please remember that following the EBacc pathway might be right for some of your students but not for others. For this reason we have developed the GCSE-BTEC Links and the single sign-up.

How can you support us further?

Please do continue to contact us if you have any further queries about the review and what it means for you and your students at btec@edexcel.com or, if you would like to register your interest in our upcoming support events or request a one-on-one consultation with one of our Curriculum Support Consultants, please visit www.edexcel.com/wolf.