

# OCR Policy Briefing

Your monthly policy update  
Edition 37 - March 2015

## “Given the benefits, far too few 16-19 year olds take up apprenticeships”

Apprenticeships can provide excellent opportunities for young people that should offer substantial training and have a positive and transformative impact on the income of those that complete them, and Level 2 Apprenticeships should remain where they meet these conditions. These are some of the outcomes of the Education Select Committee [report](#) on Apprenticeships and Traineeships for 16-19 year olds. Coinciding with National Apprenticeship Week, the report is the culmination of the inquiry launched in July 2014, and during which OCR's Director of Skills and Employment gave oral evidence.

While noting that the Traineeships programme remains in its infancy, the committee did make recommendations that greater clarity of purpose and success criteria are needed.

In total, the report makes 41 recommendations under the following broad headings:

- the quality and range of Apprenticeship provision
- benefits of Apprenticeships
- engaging young people
- reform of apprenticeship standards
- reform of apprenticeship funding

- increasing employer engagement
- Traineeships.

Key themes in these recommendations are of ensuring clarity and quality, the need for high quality advice and guidance and the need for fixed plans on concluding existing reforms, and the design of the post-Trailblazer system. Of particular interest is the Committee's recommendation on English and maths - that Trailblazers should be allowed to choose which level 2 qualification is required for their standard. When considering the Education and Training Foundation review, the committee expressed concern that the presumption towards GCSE may deter perfectly capable candidates from becoming Apprentices.

On Traineeships, there are fewer recommendations due to the limited data available as the programme is still so new. However, here as well, the key recommendation was about clarity of purpose of the programme and the need for better tracking of Trainees to understand what their destinations are, so judgements can be made as to the relative success of the programme.

## Goals set out for apprenticeship system

### Also in this issue:

- > Higher vocational education > VQ routes to higher education > GCSE maths and English learner survey
- > Progress 8 > Character education > Countdown to General Election
- > STOP PRESS including all the latest announcements on 2017 GQ subjects, a future qualifications framework and more
- > The Last Word: commentary on key issues

leaving school, achieved by joining up government datasets rather than manual tracking by schools

- To increase employer demand
  - Include career progression information in apprenticeship standards
  - Create a definitive list of occupations
  - Employer bodies, industrial partnerships and large employers should take the lead in establishing shared apprenticeship schemes within sectors.
- For high quality training
  - Government should support the creation of an apprentice charter to serve as an employer quality mark
  - Improvements are needed relating to the amalgamation of data and its sharing with employers.

A number of these recommendations support any apprenticeship system, not just the Trailblazer scheme currently being run by the joint BIS/DfE Apprenticeship unit to lead on the reforms to Apprenticeships. On Trailblazer activity, BIS has published a [research paper](#) as an interim report into evaluating the Trailblazer initiative. While finding the process so far to be “for the large part, very positive”, the report does indicate some emerging risks that need attention within the next few months. These risks align to some of the findings of the Education Select Committees own report, and relate to the need for a ‘steady state’ for future apprenticeship standards development.

## The future of higher vocational education

Leading universities should work with employers to develop apprenticeships linked to cutting-edge research, particularly in high-skill industries. This is one of the recommendations in a [report](#) by the University of Sheffield and University of Warwick which calls for vocational education to no longer be the poor relation of academia. The report argues that current policy lacks clarity on higher apprenticeships and sets out a vision of industrially-relevant higher vocational education including:

- Apprenticeships and degree routes should grow out of the existing strengths of research-intensive universities in partnership with key industries and be embedded in city and regional growth strategies.
- In addition to developing technical and vocational

education within schools and colleges, the UK needs to support a growing manufacturing sector by investing in the highest quality vocational education based in a series of elite universities.

- The home for a new generation of university vocational provision would be National Centres of Excellence, with close partnerships between industry and universities
- These new centres would be designated as Royal Technology Centres.

The report also highlights the growing number of entries to universities with vocational qualifications and calls on universities to review their admissions criteria for entry.

## Vocational qualifications are increasing route to Higher Education

Participation rates in HE are improving for young people with level 3 vocational qualifications according to a new [report](#) from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The report looks at the rates of young participation in HE for pupils from English schools and colleges based on their attainment in terms of qualifications studied at the level prior to HE.

Latest trends include:

- The number and proportion of pupils holding a vocational qualification or a combination of Level 3 qualifications has risen.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades of vocational qualifications has increased. Within this, the numbers of pupils holding a combination of A Level and vocational qualifications has increased tenfold from 2006 to 2013. The vast majority of pupils holding this combination of qualifications have an

achievement equivalent, in overall size, to at least three A Level grades.

- Pupils with A Levels or International Baccalaureate Diplomas generally have higher participation rates in higher education than those with other Level 3 qualifications.
- Pupils holding Level 3 qualifications in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects have higher rates of young participation in higher education than those who did not study STEM subjects.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades at A Level has remained broadly static between 2006 and 2013 (30,975 in summer 2013).
- Young participation rates differ across the English regions for pupils holding A Levels and similar qualifications.

## GCSE maths and English: learner voices captured

Young people's attitudes towards GCSE maths and English change once they realise how important the subjects and qualifications are to their future job and education prospects, according to new research published by [NIACE](#), the national voice for lifelong learning. The research also shows that if learners understand how relevant the qualifications are to their everyday lives, if they find the subjects interesting and if they are taught in a supportive setting, then they are more likely to achieve better grades.

The report, *Engaging Learners in GCSE maths and English*, showed that learners were more likely to engage and have positive attitudes to maths and English when:

- learning was fun, interactive and practical, where there was a strong understanding of the purpose and importance of qualifications, in particular when relating them to real-life situations
- appropriate time and support were given to individuals to practise challenging topics, in and out of the classroom
- there was an assessment process with clear marking schemes, which enabled learners to adequately prepare for exams and coursework assignments
- timely initial assessments were carried out to identify support needs, and any additional support was put in place as soon as possible
- class sizes were kept small - larger classes were perceived as a barrier to effective teaching and learning
- a supportive environment was fostered in the classroom and learners were encouraged to ask for help from teachers and peers. Embarrassment could be a strong factor in not asking for support when needed
- practitioners listened to learners' needs and support and learning was tailored accordingly.

The overall aim of the research was to support NIACE in its work to upskill the FE workforce and increase the number of young people gaining Level 2 maths and English.

## Performance measure points announced for reformed GCSEs

The DfE has confirmed how points will be allocated to new GCSEs and legacy GCSEs in the 2017 performance tables.

The new guidance confirms that for a new GCSE, the point values will match the grade a student receives (ie 9 points for a grade 9, 8 for a grade 8 etc). Full details can be found in the updated Progress 8 [guidance document](#).

## Debate continues on 'character education'

In a survey of 10,000 UK pupils aged 14 and 15, 58% failed to identify what researchers described as good judgments when responding to a series of moral dilemmas. The [study](#), conducted by Birmingham University's Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, was the largest into how character education is taught in schools. Previous research has suggested that character and virtues such as honesty, self-control, fairness, gratitude and respect, can have a positive impact on performance in schools.

An accompanying report from the Jubilee Centre found that over a third of school teachers in the study said that they did not have enough time to do their job to a high enough standard, because of increasing workloads and the focus on exams and inspections. Teacher educators interviewed for *The Good Teacher Report* said that training courses spent little time reflecting on the teaching of moral virtues, because the focus was always on meeting teachers' standards.

Key findings from the surveys include:

- Contrary to popular opinion, children who say they do sport do not demonstrate better moral judgement. Those doing music or choir, drama or charity work were better able to make good moral judgements.
- Students who said they practised their religion scored higher than those who did not.
- Girls outperformed boys.
- The survey found no difference in results based on the type or success of the school attended.
- 80% of school teachers think a focus on exams is hindering the development of character and the 'whole child' in UK schools.
- To achieve better character education for their students, many teachers recommended that schools provide more "free space" where students could be themselves and do things they really like, without having to think about assessments.
- The majority of teachers surveyed saw fairness, creativity, a love of learning, humour, perseverance and leadership as the six most important character strengths for good teachers.

The Jubilee Centre is recommending a review of character education within teacher education courses and is calling for more time for teachers to pay attention to issues of character in the classroom.

### Manifestos aplenty as key organisations set out proposals aimed at future government

**The Headteachers' Roundtable**, a non-party political think tank for school leaders, has published its proposals for a future government and calls for action to take place in the first 100 days. The five key areas are:

- A world-class teaching profession
- A rigorous, inclusive and flexible curriculum and qualifications framework
- Intelligent accountability
- Coherence in a fragmented system
- Tackling underachievement at the source.

*A Great Education for All* sets out clear policy proposals which include:

- To introduce the entitlement to a professional development programme leading to qualified teacher status for all teachers after a maximum of two years induction and a masters level professional qualification after five years
- To implement the blue print for the College of teaching with compulsory membership for all teachers
- To introduce a national baccalaureate framework
- To introduce progressive qualifications in English and maths up to level 3
- To stabilise performance measures
- To establish a national recruitment strategy.

Meanwhile, the university think tank **Million+** has published *A Manifesto for Teacher Education* in which it calls for the next government to put universities at the heart of the teacher education system and sets out a plan to secure future teacher supply in England. The Million+ group contains a number of universities which have a long history of teacher training. In 2011, the Department for Education abolished the requirement for teachers to be qualified and transferred initial teacher training places from universities to schools with schemes such as Teach First and Schools direct.

The manifesto calls on the next government to:

- Require all teachers to have an academic and professional qualification
- Restore initial teacher training numbers to universities
- Encourage universities to collaborate with schools and require schools to offer placements for trainee teachers
- Support universities to develop new programmes to train teachers in all specialist shortage subjects
- Develop a professional career framework for teachers with is qualification-based.

The main teacher unions have voiced their support for the Million+ manifesto.

**The Policy Exchange**, developing and promoting new policy ideas for a stronger society, has published its [education manifesto](#) for the 2015 General Election stating that it is not a manifesto in its traditional sense but a collection of short ideas around particular areas which complement the broader policy recommendations put forward in its published reports.

The Education Manifesto argues that given the twin risks of already declining teacher numbers and the potential from September 2015 of more highly indebted students graduating from university and deciding to go straight into work and not to undertake further teacher training, all parties should commit to a scheme of student loan repayments for some or all teachers who begin teaching in the state sector.

The manifesto includes a number of other proposals including:

- A requirement for all students to study maths from 16-18 regardless of if they are taking vocational or other academic qualifications, via a series of Ofqual-accredited online courses. This would lead to around an additional 340,000 students studying the subject
- A new deal between government and City Regions to create incentives that attract teachers to work across the country. City regions would have the power to offer teachers discounts on housing, childcare and transport costs to attract teachers and their families to live and stay in their areas.
- A new publicly-funded retraining scheme to allow adults to become qualified in strategically important sectors such as aerospace and advanced manufacturing linked to the future of the British labour market.

## Final announcements before general election

In a flurry of activity as ministers departed for the election trail and civil servants were preparing for the imposition of purdah, there was a last-minute flurry of government and regulator reports and consultations. Below is a brief overview – further information is available from [policy@ocr.org.uk](mailto:policy@ocr.org.uk).

### 2017 subjects announced

Ofqual has [published](#) its decisions on the reform of qualifications for first teaching in September 2017. Ancient History, Classical Civilisation, Film Studies, and Media Studies are amongst the list of subjects that have survived and can be developed as GCSEs and A Levels.

Subjects that will not be reformed in 2017 include GCSEs in Applied Science, Digital Communications, Law, Leisure and Tourism, Manufacturing and A Levels in Anthropology, Human Biology, Leisure Studies, Travel and Tourism.

Subjects still under review, on which Ofqual has yet to make a decision, include GCSEs in Environmental and Land-Based Science, Geology, Health and Social Care and A Levels in Creative Writing, Health and Social Care and Music Technology.

### After the QCF: a new qualifications framework

For some time, we have been expecting a technical consultation to follow Ofqual's announcement that it would withdraw the Qualifications and Credit Framework. In launching this 12-week [consultation](#), Ofqual proposes not just a replacement for the QCF but a single formal qualifications framework that would cover all types of regulated qualifications.

The consultation seeks to establish views on the following areas:

- A new Framework of Regulated Qualifications (FRQ)
  - Qualification level and level descriptors
  - Mapping to the European Qualifications Framework and Credit
  - Describing the size of qualifications – Total Qualification Time (TQT)
  - Qualification titles
  - Recognition of prior learning
- Proposed new conditions, guidance and criteria.

### Guided learning hours: analysis of consultation responses

As the issue of the replacement to GLH is covered in the 'After the QCF' consultation above, Ofqual published a question-by-question [analysis](#) of the 109 responses it received to the consultation, rather than a formal response. The consultation considered the relevance of qualifications for the Raising the Participation Age policy and estimating the size of qualifications.

For those elements of 'total qualification time' where analysis of the response has been published, namely Directed Study and Dedicated Assessment, the majority of respondents (62% and 54% respectively) thought that the definitions were not clear and appropriate.

### Expansion on hold for the Future Development of FE Loans

Nick Boles, the Minister of State for Skills, neatly summarised the [government's response](#) to the recent consultation on the future development of loans in FE: "As pointed out by a number of respondents, it makes sense to consider the implications of these changes alongside plans for the overall funding for skills provision in the future. For this reason, we will not be going ahead with our plans for expansion at the moment, but will look again at these proposals in the Spending Review."

The original consultation covered an extensive range of issues connected with potential extensions of the loans programme to different age ranges, different levels of provision, to include Higher National provision in the FE Loans pot rather than the Higher Education pot, and to introduce measures to simplify the loans programme. No major policy announcements were made in the consultation, with a conclusion, in most areas, to wait until the spending review before making decisions. The only minor exception to this is in the area of simplification and improvement to the existing loans system, where announcements were made to remove the concurrent study and repeat study rules that have been hampering take-up and progression in some areas.

### Functional Skills highly valued in review of maths and English qualifications

There was good news for Functional Skills qualifications in the publication of the Education and Training Foundation's [report on English and maths](#) – "employers are concerned about the maths and English skills of their recruits, but they are less concerned about qualifications. They use qualifications as a proxy for skills and, like the general public, employers regard GCSE as the main benchmark. However, Functional Skills are emerging as qualifications that are valued by employers, learners and the education and training sector".

These views from the executive summary of the report echo feedback that OCR shared with the review. An important finding of the report is that the branding of Functional Skills qualifications as 'stepping stones' to a



GCSE is “not helpful and not entirely accurate”. The report recognises that Functional Skills qualifications present an alternative path to Level 2 English and maths rather than a stepping stone. It also recognises the place for qualifications designed as stepping stones - “a number of non-GCSE qualifications, such as the Cambridge Progression Units, have been designed specifically to develop skills and concepts necessary for success in GCSE”.

The report concludes by making two key recommendations:

1. Making changes to content and assessment to ensure employers’ needs are met.
2. Improving employers’ awareness and understanding of Functional Skills.

## Adult vocational education: challenges over the next decade

In an unusual step as ministers were leaving their Departments, the Secretary of State for BIS launched a summary of the department’s work over the last five years and a [consultation](#) on what the next decade should hold for adult vocational education.

This consultation emphasises the need to look at the system as a whole, expecting to see greater specialisation in future as colleges focus on what they are good at, rather than trying to do everything. Key points under consideration in the consultation are the:

- role of higher vocational education
- importance of helping individuals to gain the fundamental skills required for work and life
- implications of these and wider government changes on adult further education colleges.

## The Last Word

*Paul Steer, Head of Policy, comments on some of the issues featured in this issue.*

The last few weeks have seen a flurry of activity as we have hurtled towards the dissolution of parliament with lots of loose ends being tied up, some things being kicked into the long grass, consultations and reports flying around and various groups positioning themselves with manifestos and policy briefings to get their point of view in ahead of the General Election.

One area that seems to have attracted a great deal of attention is Apprenticeships with no less than three major reports featuring on this highly popular topic. What is clear from all these reports is that Apprenticeships are seen as a critically important part of any future skills agenda, regardless of who is in power, and that Apprenticeships are a bit of a curate’s egg, with much to commend them, but more work to be done.

According to the Education Select Committee, the thorny issue of Level 2 Apprenticeships and whether they should be regarded as Apprenticeships at all is slightly fudged – they should, it argues, continue to exist where a Level 2 Apprenticeship can be proven to have a ‘positive and transformative impact on the income of those that complete them’. This is difficult to measure and subject to where an apprentice was when they started and what you think they might have achieved without the Apprenticeship programme.

Demos’s report on Apprenticeships is equally concerned with proof of the pudding, with strong recommendations for tracking the destination of apprentices and collecting data on their success. This will take time and is equally complex; it may be the case that *starting* an

Apprenticeship opens up the possibility of alternative employment and career paths with equally transformative impacts.

Nagging issues about the quality control of Apprenticeships feature in the Demos and Select Committee reports as well as a BIS research paper on Trailblazers. Demos would like to see Chartered Apprenticeships to provide an additional layer of recognition for those Apprenticeships which really pass muster. And everybody expresses angst about how best to harness employer engagement in a more systemic way. The BIS research lavishes the Trailblazer process with faint praise, describing the process as ‘for the large part very positive’.

This not-quite-ringing endorsement is echoed by Demos when it argues that Apprenticeship policy will have succeeded when ‘most parents want their own children to consider choosing an Apprenticeship’. The mixed messages about Apprenticeships are just enough to make you wonder what the contributors of these reports would think about their own offspring choosing an Apprenticeship route. And finally, the BIS research calls for a ‘steady state’ to support the future of Apprenticeship standards development. Maybe we should remind ourselves that the current model of Apprenticeships (more or less) was originally introduced in 1995 as ‘Modern Apprenticeships’ and we seem to have been reviewing and revising them ever since.

Meanwhile, there is little acknowledgement of other vocational programmes, even though the scale of uptake

of these completely dwarfs anything the Apprenticeships could match. The HEFCE report on Level 3 qualifications points to an important trend in the growth in the number of vocational qualifications providing access to HE. Qualifications like OCR's Cambridge Technicals are contributing to this massive success story within the FE Sector.

The various reviews of Apprenticeships couldn't help but look into the presumption that GCSE maths and English, where not already achieved, were the best vehicles for improving maths and English skills within Apprenticeship programmes. Right on cue comes the Education and Training Foundation report '*Making maths and English work for all*'. Hastily prepared in the window between being commissioned and the dissolution of parliament, it is a straightforward and sensible report with some simple points worth repeating: Functional Skills qualifications are a recognised brand with the majority of employers; Functional Skills are not a stepping stone to GCSE, but a set of skills in their own right; and we need other qualifications like Cambridge Progression awards to develop a foundation in maths and English.

It's a pity that Ofqual couldn't come up with something a bit simpler to define the 'size' of a qualification than we see in its proposals for 'Total Qualification Time' (see the Ofqual technical consultation on the withdrawal of the QCF). It has been suggested that a further measure may be required to indicate (approximately) the total amount of time wasted applying the TQT formula to qualifications that will, in truth, be delivered over vastly different amounts of time according to the learner's starting point, the curriculum model, and the use of different forms of e-learning and remote learning.

As we were putting this edition of OCR Policy Briefing together, news has been breaking about subjects for which GCSE and/or GCEs will not be redeveloped or are subject to review. It would be wrong not to comment specifically on some of the attention that has been given to the fact that OCR has indicated that it is reviewing the future of its provision in some of the lesser-taught languages. Over the coming weeks, we will be meeting with many of the stakeholders who have contacted us to discuss their concerns, understand the impact of withdrawing GCSEs in these languages and to explore what possible ways forward may be available to us. It would be wrong to sound an optimistic note at this stage; all the languages under review have been offered at significant financial cost to OCR, in many cases since 1994.

The days when exam boards could carry a wide range of loss-making qualifications are hugely threatened by the increasing costs of 'staying in the game'. The impact of relentless policy reforms and increasing regulation (TQT is but a tiny example) make it very difficult to commit to offering new qualifications which cannot be withdrawn for years to come. The lesser-taught languages bring particular technical difficulties with awarding as the cohorts are often very small and atypical of non-first language speakers. If we are to find a resolution whereby language learning is to grow in secondary schools and elsewhere, there will need to be some clear commitment and determination from a wider range of players including policy makers, the regulator of the market and the qualifications, Ofsted, and, critically, a growing number of schools themselves.

*Information is correct at the time of writing. OCR can accept no liability for any decisions made on the basis of the information given.*