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## **Key Stage 4 performance measures: stakeholder survey**

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## **Introduction**

This survey seeks your views on school performance measures related to qualifications at Key Stage 4.

Performance measures are being reviewed in response to the recommendations for change set out in the Review of Qualifications for 14- to 19-year-olds in Wales, and concerns about unintended consequences of the current set of measures.

The proposals and questions in this survey aim to ensure that government focuses its school accountability measures in respect of qualifications on those qualifications that we know are most valued by learners, parents, schools, employers and post-16 and higher education. Alignment between those two elements gives the potential to drive behaviours in ways which benefit both learners in terms of progression routes and a nation in terms of the qualification profile of its citizens.

Please respond to the survey on the accompanying response form, by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

Following analysis of responses, decisions will be announced before the end of the summer term 2014.

# Section 1: Background

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the current review is to determine:

- What basic measures should be used at KS4 in relation to qualifications;
- What relative weighting and emphasis should be placed on the two key types of measure, threshold measures and capped points scores. Threshold measures, such as the current level 2 inclusive measure and the new Welsh Baccalaureate measures, identify the proportion of learners achieving a certain designated minimum level of attainment. Capped points scores measure overall attainment at a range of levels;
- Whether there should be a shift towards greater relative weighting for and public emphasis placed on capped points scores rather than threshold measures.

Performance measures can create unintended consequences. This review aims to develop a way forward which minimises this risk, by ensuring the greatest possible alignment between what the Welsh Government measures and what is valued by learners, parents, providers, higher education and employers. There will never be a perfect solution that measures everything that is valued, but we aim, by listening to stakeholders and experts, to arrive at a system that is readily understood and accurately measures what is most valued.

## 1.2 What is outside the scope of this review?

This review looks only at measures related to attainment of external qualifications, used at the end of Key Stage 4. It does not consider banding methodology. However, its findings, including those about the emphasis that should be placed on different types of measure, will be taken into account in any future review of banding.

It is in banding calculations that contextual factors are taken into account, largely designed to provide a more level playing field for centres with demographically different intakes. Current contextualisation includes:

- residuals to show the relationship between a school's results and what would be expected given the number of pupils eligible for free school meals;
- value added measures to show pupils' progress from Key Stages 2 and 3 to Key Stage 4;
- progress measures to show changes in a school's performance over time.

None of these treatments of the basic measures is considered in the current review. The aim is to get the basic measures right, on which residuals, added value measures, progress measures or other contextual adjustments may later be based.

### 1.3 What is within the scope of this review?

In announcing this review at the national qualifications conference in December 2013, the Minister for Education and Skills, Huw Lewis, made the following points:

- *“The level 2 inclusive measure, while it serves some important purposes, can create a fixation on the C grade and a disproportionate focus on learners in the middle of the ability spectrum.*
- *We need measures that provide motivation cross the ability range, encourage aspiration to the highest grades, and recognise the achievements of learners working at level 1.*
- *Early entry has led to many learners having to settle for C grades when they could have achieved more.*
- *There is a danger that simply swapping from level 2 inclusive to the Welsh Baccalaureate measure, which is itself a threshold measure, will not by itself address these concerns.*
- *We should reward schools and colleges for helping every learner to achieve the very best grades they can, for instance through more emphasis on capped points scores.*
- *I will also look at how we can make sure that, as well as the new GCSEs testing literacy and numeracy, most learners also take the second maths GCSE and at least one science GCSE.*
- *By announcing my intention today, I hope to put a stop to some of the behaviour that our current emphasis on threshold measures has inadvertently encouraged.*
- *I am giving a clear signal that we value, and will measure, every learner achieving the highest grades they can in their subject based qualifications, and developing core and transferable skills such as those assessed through the Welsh Bac.”*

Many stakeholders and commentators consider that there is currently too much emphasis on achievement of C grades, sometimes at the expense of higher grades. The emphasis results in part from a general perception of the C grade as a ‘pass’ at GCSE. However it is accentuated by the actual or perceived importance of threshold measures. The current banding arrangements include a number of points score elements which should to some extent offset the emphasis on the C grade. However, behaviour patterns by schools indicate that it is this emphasis is increasing.

One impact of the emphasis on C grades is high levels of early entry (before the end of Year 11) for GCSEs, particularly in English/Welsh and Maths. There may be scenarios in which early entry is beneficial for learners – for instance, because they can achieve the highest grades early and go on to take GCSE Further Maths, or because they become motivated to achieve a higher grade at a later sitting. However, in many cases learners achieve a C grade early and do not have the opportunity to go on to achieve a higher grade later. This inappropriate early entry for GCSEs has been identified by DfES and Estyn as a problem. Similar concerns have been raised elsewhere in the UK. The recommendations of this review aim to reduce the emphasis

on the C grade, and to reward centres for every learner achieving the best grades they can, which will in turn reduce inappropriate early entry.

The issue of over emphasis on achievement of C grades is a key focus of this review. In addition the review is particularly interested in whether:

- In line with the Welsh Government's priorities, measures should include incentives for centres to encourage all learners to take the new GCSEs assessing numeracy and literacy (GCSE Mathematics-Numeracy and either GCSE English Language or GCSE Welsh Language)
- measures should include incentives for centres to encourage most learners to take the other new maths GCSE (GCSE Mathematics), as recommended by the Review of Qualifications and Welsh Government
- any other subjects should attract incentives, but with a clear understanding that not all subjects can fall in this category
- there might be any unintended consequences of the proposals being made, for instance on the Key Stage 4 curriculum, in the English and Welsh medium sectors

## Section 2: Options and analysis

### 2.1 Threshold measures: Welsh Baccalaureate measures at Levels 1 and 2

This section sets out the move, already announced, from the current threshold measures, including the Level 2 inclusive, to Welsh Bac measures, and the reasons for this move. It seeks views on the timing of introduction of the new Welsh Bac measures.

Recommendation 38 of the Review of Qualifications was that

*‘The Welsh Government should make attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate at the National Foundation, National and Advanced levels the headline performance measures at Levels 1, 2... respectively from 2017. At each of the levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate requirements exceed those of the current threshold measures. This change therefore represents a raising of the bar in terms of expectations about the qualifications learners should achieve.’*

The recommendation was broadly accepted in January 2013. Ministers have since agreed that:

- Welsh Bac attainment should replace the Level 1, Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive measures
- Data for the existing threshold measures (Level 1, Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive) should continue to be collected in the medium term for continuity and analysis of trends and impacts. It should be noted that there will not be perfect continuity or comparability over time because of changes to several key qualifications, and changes to GCSE equivalence ratings
- The weight given to Welsh Bac measures at KS4 as compared with the weight given to capped points scores should be reconsidered

The main reasons for adopting attainment of the Welsh Bac as the new threshold measures are:

- The Welsh Bac is the key overarching qualification that will be taken by learners at Key Stage 4 across Wales. Its achievement is an appropriate threshold – it requires literacy, numeracy, essential skills and a range of GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.
- Its use as a performance measure will encourage universal adoption of the Welsh Bac, as recommended by the Review of Qualifications. This will retain the focus on literacy and numeracy of the current Level 2 inclusive measure, and encourage the development of other core and transferable skills within schools, in line with the direction of the review of the curriculum in Wales
- It provides continuity, being similar to the current threshold measures
- It sets a higher standard than the current measures by requiring the Welsh Bac core in addition to the supporting qualifications (GCSEs and equivalents)



The main concern about the introduction of the new measure is comparability with previous years or performance in England. Because the Welsh Bac requires more of learners than the current threshold measures do, initially after adoption, fewer learners will achieve the new measures than the old. Clear communication will be important to explain the lower rate of achievement of the new measures, and that they are not directly comparable with the previous measures.

In the past, it has been possible to compare performance between Wales and England due to the similarity between KS4 measures in the two countries. There have been minor differences between measures. However, from 2014 major changes are being introduced to measures in England: each vocational qualification will count as one GCSE and new discounting arrangements will narrow the range of qualifications feeding into threshold measures. From 2015, there will be measures with the same name in both countries that are in reality different measures, making direct comparison difficult or impossible. It is likely that international benchmarks such as PISA will start to become the common method of comparison. PISA is robust but infrequent and does not allow the detailed analysis of each subject on a range of measures that we can get from comparison of current data sets with England. Other international tests may be used to benchmark performance, including the TIMSS and PIRLS tests. TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) assesses 4th and 8th grade students in over 60 nations on a 4-year cycle. PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) operates on a 5-year cycle.

Risks and concerns related to placing too much emphasis on the Welsh Bac measure are discussed in section 2.4.

### **Composition of the measure**

The new Welsh Baccalaureate will be introduced for teaching from September 2015. The requirements at Key Stage 4 of the new National (level 2) and Foundation (level 1) Welsh Bac are:

- GCSE English Language or GCSE Welsh Language
- GCSE Mathematics - Numeracy
- Three further GCSEs (of which up to two may be equivalent qualifications)
- Welsh Bac core, consisting of an Individual Project plus three challenges to develop and assess a range of skills for learning, work and life.
- The Welsh Bac will be graded.

For a Foundation Welsh Bac, the GCSEs listed must be achieved at grades A\* to G. The requirements are therefore similar to the current Level 1 threshold measure, but with the additional requirement of including English/Welsh and Maths-Numeracy, a further actual GCSE and the Welsh Bac core.

For a National Welsh Bac, the GCSEs listed must be achieved at A\* to C. The requirements of the Level 2 Welsh Bac are thus very similar to the

composition of the current Level 2 inclusive threshold measure, but with the additional requirement of achieving the Welsh Bac core.

The qualifications counting towards the literacy and numeracy elements of the revised Welsh Bac are the new GCSEs listed as requirements above – other qualifications, including literature qualifications, will not count. It is worth noting that for reporting from 2017, literature qualifications will also not count towards the ‘inclusive’ part of the level 2 inclusive threshold measure for as long as these measures are retained.

### **Timing of introduction of Welsh Bac measures**

The Review of Qualifications proposed that the new measures should be introduced for reporting in 2017, following introduction of the new qualification in 2015. However, following feedback from stakeholders we invite your views on whether this change should be delayed to reporting from 2018. This is because some centres would be delivering the Welsh Bac for the first time from 2015, and those who already deliver it would be adapting to a very different specification. We would expect all schools to use this year to focus on ensuring effective delivery of the challenges and on high quality teaching and assessment of the essential skills.

#### **Proposals**

Already announced:

- Measures of attainment of the Welsh Baccalaureate at Levels 1 and 2 will replace the Level 1, Level 2 and Level 2 inclusive threshold measures.
- Data for the current threshold measures will continue to be collected in the medium term for use in internal Welsh Government analysis of trends, three year data sets etc, but will not be reported with any prominence.

**New proposal:**

- **Consideration should be given to delaying the move from current threshold measures to Welsh Bac measures until reporting from 2018 – a year later than originally proposed.**

#### **Survey question:**

1. ***Do you think that the change from current threshold measures to Welsh Bac measures should be introduced in 2017 or 2018? Why?***

## 2.2 Capped points score

This section looks at how the design and composition of the capped points score and whether changes should be made to improve it.

The Minister for Education and Skills asked this review to consider the use of the current capped points score or variations on it. This is because

- it is a well established and understood methodology, familiar to centres
- it accommodates qualifications of different types and sizes and different patterns and combinations of individual learners
- it differentiates between grades for graded qualifications and thereby properly recognises and rewards centres for encouraging all learners to achieve their full potential, whether this is at Level 1 or an A\* grade. It does not place any special focus on the C grade
- it looks at the 'best eight' GCSEs or equivalents in volume. Limiting the number of subjects removes any incentive for centres to encourage learners to take excessive numbers of qualifications. We know from higher education and employers that eight to ten GCSEs or equivalent are sufficient for learners whatever pathway they wish to pursue. Higher grades are valued more than a larger number of qualifications at lower grades.

The main criticisms of the capped points score are:

- that it is not easily understood by the general public, because the score itself is simply a number with no immediately apparent scale or meaning. A proposal to address this problem is set out below.
- That the same score can be achieved in a number of different ways, and no minimum threshold of specific requirements is guaranteed by any particular score. Some stakeholders have raised concerns that some combinations of qualifications which score relatively highly in the capped points score are not necessarily the best set of qualifications from the learner's perspective. This has already been partially addressed through the introduction of the two GCSE maximum equivalence for VQs for reporting from 2016. Proposals to further reduce the scope for variety within the composition of individuals' points scores are discussed below.

### Types of variation

There are several ways in which the capped points score could be changed. The changes could be made either individually or in combination. Each of the following variations is considered below.

- a. Requiring specific qualifications
- b. Weighting some qualifications
- c. Excluding some qualifications
- d. Increasing the number of qualifications counted
- e. Limiting the number of some sizes or types of qualification
- f. Making changes to discounting rules
- g. Making the score easier to understand

### **a. Requiring specific qualifications**

We could prescribe some or all of the qualifications within the 'eight'. The most obvious qualifications to require would be the new GCSE Mathematics (Numeracy) and GCSE English Language or Welsh language.

There is a range of possibilities in the level of prescription:

1. No prescription
2. GCSEs in English Language or Welsh Language and Maths – Numeracy
3. GCSEs in English Language or Welsh Language, Maths – Numeracy and one or two other qualifications such as GCSE Mathematics and/or a learner's best GCSE result in a science
4. Prescription of most or all of the eight, for instance to include English Language or Welsh Language, Maths – Numeracy, Mathematics, a science, a language, a humanity or arts subject, computing/ICT, Welsh Second Language.

#### Advantages of requiring specific qualifications

- Requiring specific qualifications within the eight would make the points score easier to understand and fairer between centres, as it would be more consistent in its composition between learners and centres.
- Requiring priority subjects means that centres will encourage learners to take qualifications valued by employers and higher education
- Requiring literacy and numeracy qualifications dovetails with Welsh Government priorities, the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, and the recommendations of the Review of Qualifications.
- It would provide a greater assurance of learners having English/Welsh and Maths (Numeracy) GCSE, similar to the current threshold 2 inclusive but recognising grades below and above C.
- Requiring GCSE Mathematics could help achieve the aim of most learners taking both new maths GCSEs, as recommended by the Review of Qualifications and endorsed by Welsh Government.
- Requiring a GCSE in science could help ensure that numbers of learners taking science are maintained or increased and address concerns about falling participation and progression in science. It would be in line with commitments in the Science for Wales strategic agenda to ensure that STEM subjects are 'in the vanguard of modern engaging curricula'. There has been a sharp increase in students not taking any science GCSE. In England proportionately 50% more students take triple science than in Wales. Some incentive may be needed to ensure that learners take at least one science GCSE.
- Requiring other subjects, such as modern foreign languages or literature could help combat falling numbers in these areas.

#### Disadvantages of requiring specific qualifications

- Prescription of English/Welsh and Mathematics (Numeracy) could be seen as double counting, as these qualifications are also requirements for the Welsh Baccalaureate.

- There would be significant debate about which subjects or qualifications should count, with lobbying from a number of interest groups. There could be a process of attrition over the years, with more subjects being added to reflect current priorities, eroding choice for learners and the recognition of different types of learning success.
- It is suggested that across Wales it would be appropriate for approximately 80% of the cohort to take both maths GCSEs, while for 20% of learners it might be appropriate to focus on fluency in the maths contained in GCSE Mathematics - Numeracy. We would not wish to create an unintended consequence of all learners being encouraged to take both maths GCSEs if this was not appropriate for them.
- If there is a very high level of prescription, for instance with more than half the subjects prescribed, then:
  - This would reduce or remove the flexibility of the measure to accommodate the 'best eight' of a range of learners with different interests and talents, and centres with different demographic intakes.
  - It could have a detrimental impact on the take up of some subjects not in the prescribed list, or on double or triple science. The impact on science could be reduced by including a learner's best science GCSE result, which would tend to lead to schools encouraging learners to take more than one science GCSE.
  - There is unlikely to be room even within eight choices to incorporate all subject areas for which a case could be made
  - The reduction in flexibility could potentially impact on motivation and engagement

Most of the disadvantages of this variation only relate to a very high level of prescription of subjects. It is therefore proposed that option 4 is rejected. The arguments for some prescription are strong. It is therefore proposed that Option 1 is rejected. The arguments for requiring English or Welsh, and Maths – Numeracy are strong. The arguments for requiring the second maths and a science subject also have merit.

#### **Proposal**

**The capped points score should be changed so that GCSEs in Maths – Numeracy and in either English Language or Welsh Language should be required within each learner's score.**

**In addition to these requirements, consideration should be given to requiring GCSE Mathematics, and the learner's best GCSE in a science subject within each learner's score.**

### Survey questions:

- 2. Do you agree that the capped points score should be changed to require GCSEs in Maths – Numeracy and in either English Language or Welsh Language within each learner's capped point score?  
Why/why not?**
- 3. Do you think that GCSE Mathematics should also be required within each learner's capped points score?  
Why/why not?**
- 4. Do you think that the learner's best GCSE in a science subject should also be required within each learner's capped points score?  
Why/why not?**

### **b. Weighting some qualifications**

The capped points score could be changed so that some qualifications are given greater weighting, relative to their size, for instance double or one-and-a-half the weighting of other qualifications.

#### Advantages of weighting certain qualifications

- This variation could encourage take up of priority subjects, but to a lesser extent than (a).
- It would increase even further the incentive to encourage aspiration to the highest grades possible for each learner in all the weighted subjects, as the differentials between grades in these subjects would be greater.
- This approach could be used to encourage take up of the second maths GCSE, if it was felt that it should not be prescribed within the best eight. We expect most learners to take both maths GCSEs, but for perhaps 20% of learners nationally it might be more appropriate for them to focus their efforts on improving fluency in the maths they will need to for everyday life, and just taking the Maths-Numeracy GCSE. Therefore weighting might work better than requiring the subject for this qualification.
- This could be used to encourage literature qualifications by weighting the best of a learner's language and literature qualifications

### Disadvantages of weighting certain qualifications

- Weighting would reduce transparency. It would be less clear what a certain score meant about learners or cohorts, and comparisons between years or centres would be difficult. The same scores could be achieved in a number of different ways, and trends in number would not have clear meanings on their own. Estyn, Welsh Government, parents and others might end up having to unpick and interrogate the data further, or rely on other measures for clarity.
- Modelling the impact of changes would be complex.
- It could appear that, for instance, a C in one subject was considered of greater value than an A in another.
- It could exacerbate extremes for schools in different demographic areas.

### Proposal

**Further consideration should be given to whether the following GCSEs should be weighted within the capped points score:**

- **English Language or Welsh Language, or a learner's best language or literature qualification;**
- **Maths-Numeracy,**
- **Mathematics.**

**No other qualifications should be weighted.**

### Survey questions

**5. Do you think that any qualifications should be weighted within the capped points score?**

***Why/why not?***

***If you feel that weighting should be used, which qualifications should be weighted?***

### c. Excluding some qualifications

The aim here would be to ensure that all qualifications counting towards the capped points score are appropriate, valued and meet certain minimum standards. To a certain extent this will already happen as a result of other changes from the Review of Qualifications:

- For vocational qualifications, the removal of CVETs from the offer at Key Stage 4 means qualifications will be appropriate for learners' age and stage.
- The stronger gatekeeping process will ensure relevance and value of qualifications approved for public funding.
- The removal of Essential Skills Wales and Wider key Skills qualifications at KS4, replaced by new GCSEs and the Welsh Bac, removes a large number of individual qualifications.
- The gradual move towards a single suite of GCSEs reduces the range of awarding organisations and specifications available.

Examples of potential exclusions are:

- The Welsh Baccalaureate. Currently, the Welsh Bac core is worth a B grade GCSE (points for Foundation are equivalent to a short course GCSE; those for Intermediate equivalent to a full course GCSE). However, achievement of the Welsh Bac will become the new threshold measure (section 2.1). Its contribution towards the wider capped points score could therefore be seen as double counting, and could be confusing. However, retention of the Welsh Bac core as a contributor to the capped points score would incentivise the delivery of the skills development of the Welsh Bac to all learners, including those who may not achieve the qualification at Level 2 (because they might not achieve the supporting qualification requirements).
- Non-GCSEs in science for reporting from 2018, following development of a new suite of science GCSEs for delivery from 2016. This was trailed as a likely change in the Minister's conference speech in December 2013. The revised GCSE suite in science would need to include suitable qualifications providing an engaging and practical approach to scientific literacy.

Advantages of excluding certain qualifications

- The more closely defined the wider capped points score becomes, the easier it is to understand and the easier it is to make meaningful comparisons between centres on the basis of the measure.
- This approach could be used on a case by case basis to ensure that all qualifications that count towards the capped points score are suitably robust.

Disadvantages of excluding certain qualifications

- Strong evidence would be required on a case by case basis to exclude specific qualifications from measures. For new qualifications, the evidence would be difficult to validate. Gatekeeping should ensure the relevance and value of all qualifications offered, removing the need to exclude any from performance measures.

### **Proposals**

**Neither the Welsh Bac nor the Welsh Bac core should count towards the capped points score, because measures of attainment of the Welsh Bac will be the new threshold measures.**

**For reporting from 2018, non-GCSEs in traditional science subjects should not count towards the capped points score (or any other performance measure).**

**Any other proposals to exclude specific qualifications should be considered on their merits as they arise, always allowing legacy arrangements for qualifications being studied by current cohorts.**



### Survey questions

6. ***Do you agree that neither the Welsh Bac qualification nor its core should count towards the capped points score?  
Why/why not?***
7. ***Do you agree that for reporting from 2018, non-GCSEs in traditional science subjects should not count towards any performance measures?  
Why/why not?***
8. ***Are there any qualifications which you think should be considered for exclusion? Please give your reasons.***

### **d. Increasing the number of qualifications counted**

Most schools offer more than eight courses to their learners at Key Stage 4. If all the expected qualifications are taken, including two maths GCSEs for most learners from 2015, most learners will typically be taking nine or more GCSEs or equivalent (given that several VQs are still worth two GCSEs). In Welsh medium schools in particular, eight qualifications would be a relatively low number. We should therefore consider whether there is a case for increasing the number of subjects included in the capped eight, for instance to a 'capped nine' or 'capped ten'. However, this needs to be balanced against the fact that higher grades are preferable to higher numbers of qualifications. We are inviting views on this question.

### Survey question

9. ***Should the capped points score be changed from 'best eight' to 'best nine' or 'best ten'?  
Why/why not?  
If you think it should be changed, how many qualifications should be counted?***

### **e. Limiting the number of some sizes or types of qualification.**

It is better for learners to acquire qualifications that are mostly equivalent to or larger than full length GCSEs in size, rather than accumulating large numbers of smaller qualifications.

There could be a limit on the contribution of non-GCSEs to the capped points score. Their contribution to threshold measures and to the requirements of the new Welsh Bac, was limited to 40% on the recommendation of the Review of Qualifications. This means that for the Bac and for threshold measures from 2017, two of the possible five GCSEs can be equivalents, and that centres will therefore want all learners to have at least three actual GCSEs. In line with this, for the wider capped points score there could be a requirement that three or, more challengingly, four qualifications are GCSEs.

It should be noted that in England the requirement is for five of the eight qualifications to be GCSEs.

Advantages of limiting the number of some sizes or types of qualifications

- The more closely defined the wider capped points score becomes, the easier it is to understand and the easier it is to make meaningful comparisons between centres on the basis of the measure.
- The change would encourage centres to steer learners towards a set of qualifications likely to be valued by employers and further/higher education.

Disadvantages of limiting the number of some sizes or types of qualifications

- If more combinations are excluded, flexibility will be reduced for individual learners.

#### **Proposal**

**For all performance points purposes at KS4, qualifications should be classed as one of the following sizes: 0.5 of a GCSE, 1 GCSE, 2 GCSEs. Where the size falls between these numbers, it should be rounded down.**

**Only two qualifications smaller than a single-award GCSE should be counted towards the points score. This would include Short Course GCSEs**

**Four of the eight qualifications in the capped points score should be GCSEs, with up to four being equivalent qualifications. This will have the effect in practice of limiting the number of larger qualifications to two.**

#### **Survey questions**

**10. Do you agree that there should be a maximum of two qualifications smaller than a GCSE within each learner's capped points score?  
Why/why not?**

**11. Do you agree that four of the eight qualifications should be GCSEs (not equivalent qualifications)?  
Why/why not?  
If you disagree, how many should be GCSEs?**

#### **f. Making changes to discounting rules**

Discounting is the system by which we ensure that if a learner has a number of similar qualifications, only one is counted towards performance measures.

For reporting from 2017, we need to decide whether to extend the discounting rules so that they cross qualification type boundaries: ie if a learner has both a GCSE and a vocational qualification in the same subject, only one of these

should count. However, it may not be necessary to overhaul the whole system; we could tackle each area on the basis of need. We are proposing that for reporting from 2018 only GCSEs should be counted for science subjects. For other subject areas where there may be concerns, we could carry out a specific exercise to determine which qualifications should be placed in the same group for discounting.

**Proposal**

**Discounting arrangements should be considered on a case by case basis as needed.**

**Survey question**

***12. Do you agree that discounting arrangements should be considered on a case by case basis from 2017 onwards?  
Why/why not?  
Are there any specific issues in relation to discounting that you would like to raise?***

**g. Making the score easier to understand**

The main criticism of the points score is that it is expressed as a number, the meaning of which is not clear to many stakeholders. Its meaning could be made clearer by expressing it in different ways. Some possible approaches would be:

- Converting the score to a percentage. Scores could be expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score, which would be achieved if every learner gained eight A\* GCSEs. However, this would mean that no school would score a very high percentage. Scores might therefore be better expressed as a percentage of a high but achievable score, to be determined.
- Expressing the score in terms of the number of learners achieving a certain score, or deciles of learners achieving certain scores. This could be presented graphically.
- Converting the score back into an average range of grades (eg 4As, 3Bs, 1C)
- Using a range rather than an overall average for a school.

**Proposal**

**The capped points score for each centre should be made easier to understand and more accessible. Consideration should be given to the best means of expressing the score to give greater clarity about its meaning.**

### Survey questions

**13. Do you agree that the score should be expressed differently to make its meaning clearer?  
If yes, what model would you suggest?**

## 2.3 Core Subject Indicator

The Core Subject Indicator (CSI) measures the percentage of pupils achieving at least a GCSE at grade A\*-C (or equivalent qualification) in each of English or Welsh first language, Mathematics and Science. It is not widely used and does not feature in banding, but still appears in the core data pack and in MyLocalSchool. Suggestions elsewhere in this survey set out proposals for encouraging the inclusion of the core subjects within each learner's qualifications.

### Proposal

**The Core Subject Indicator should not be used for reporting from 2017, if GCSE English or Welsh first language, Maths-Numeracy and a science are all required within the revised capped points score, and GCSE Mathematics is either required or weighted within the score.**

### Survey questions

**14. Do you agree that subject to the assumptions stated, the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) should no longer be used?  
Why/why not?**

## 2.4 Balance between threshold measures and points scores

This section looks at how much weight should be placed on each type of measure. Threshold measures, including the new Welsh Bac measures, identify the proportion of learners who have achieved a certain designated minimum standard. Capped points scores measure overall attainment at a range of levels. Both types of measure have value and perform important functions, but it is important to get the right balance between them.

In announcing this review, the Minister for Education and Skills asked for it to specifically look at the relative emphasis we should place on threshold and capped points score measures. He said 'I am determined that we should reward schools and colleges for helping every learner to achieve the very best grades they can, for instance through more emphasis on capped points scores.'

Changes being introduced as a result of the Review of Qualifications will improve the stability and transparency of performance measures relating to qualifications:

- The two-GCSE maximum equivalence for non GCSEs removes the previous disproportionate incentive for centres to encourage learners to follow large VQs.
- The limit on the contribution of VQs towards threshold measures and the Welsh Bac will mean that learners will tend to have a broader and more general set of qualifications.
- The move towards a single suite of GCSEs and A levels will mean only one specification is available for many subjects.
- The stronger gatekeeping of VQs will ensure that all contributing qualifications are valued and relevant. The use of IVETs only (pre-16) will mean that only age-appropriate qualifications are used.
- the new GCSEs in English Language/Welsh Language and Mathematics-Numeracy will be the only qualifications above Entry level available at KS4 in literacy and numeracy in Wales. Essential Skills Wales and Wider Key Skills qualifications will no longer contribute towards performance measures at KS4.

The Review of Qualifications proposed that achievement of the Welsh Bac should be the ‘headline’ measures at level 1 and 2, replacing the current threshold measures. The rationale was that this would measure what was most important, and would encourage universal adoption of the Welsh Bac. However, since the Review reported, concerns have increased over the impact of the emphasis on the C grade associated with threshold measures. As a result, Ministers have indicated that, while the Welsh Bac measures will still be important in measuring the proportion of learners achieving a basic minimum standard, consideration should be given to placing more emphasis on capped points scores than on threshold measures, including the Welsh Bac measures. It is worth noting that steps have also been taken in England to reduce the emphasis on threshold measures.

There are risks associated with placing too much emphasis on the Welsh Bac performance measures:

- the Welsh Bac could become perceived as primarily as a performance measure rather than as a qualification (for instance by confusion with the English Baccalaureate which is only a performance measure and not a qualification).
- Welsh Bac performance measures could perpetuate an emphasis on the C grade. This is because the supporting qualifications within the Welsh Bac must be achieved at grade C for achievement of the National Welsh Bac.
- Schools may feel under pressure to secure certain quotas of attainment, rather than focusing on the quality of teaching and learning within the Welsh Bac core. Its delivery could become less creative, dynamic and learner-led than intended, and assessment could be less robust or objective than we would wish.

Threshold measures and capped points scores measure different things, each of which is important. Each serves a different purpose and each has important functions. We propose retaining both types of measure, in the form of the new Welsh Bac (threshold) measures and a revised, more defined, capped points

score. However, we consider that there is a strong case for a shift of emphasis, as set out in the proposal below.

### **Proposal**

- **Greater emphasis should be placed on the capped points score than on threshold (including Welsh Bac) measures. This should apply to:**
  - **Core data packs, schools' self-evaluation, publicity, prospectuses and governors reports to parents**
  - **Welsh Government statistical releases and commentary on exam/qualification results**
  - **MyLocalSchool**
- **Any future review of banding arrangements or development of the national categorisation system should take into account the recommendation to place greater emphasis on capped points scores than threshold (including Welsh Bac) measures. National and regional banding or categorisation should use the new measures set out above in relation to qualification attainment at KS4.**
- **Welsh Government should report separately on points in English/Welsh and Mathematics-Numeracy as well as percentages achieving certain grades in these qualifications.**

### **Survey questions**

***15. Do you agree that there should be a greater emphasis on capped points scores than on threshold (including Welsh Bac) measures? Why/why not?***

***16. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?***