

Promoting achievement, valuing success: a strategy for 14–19 qualifications



department for
children, schools and families



Department for Children,
Schools and Families

Promoting achievement, valuing success: a strategy for 14–19 qualifications

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
by Command of Her Majesty

March 2008

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Foreword



The Children's Plan set out our aim of a world-class education system for all 14-19 year olds, giving every young person the opportunity to make the most of their talents. Qualifications and the curriculum have a key role to play in meeting this ambition, guiding what young people study and how that learning is assessed and recognised. Every year, hundreds of thousands of young people work towards qualifications. Through their own hard work and the skill and commitment of their teachers, these qualifications open up opportunities to progress further in learning and employment, and position them for success in life.

There has been a significant increase in the number of learners securing qualifications in secondary and post-secondary education. In 2007, 46% of 16 year-olds achieved 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics, compared to around 36% in 1997. More 16-19 year-olds are staying on in education and training, and more are achieving better results. In 2007, 74% of young people reached level 2 (five higher grade GCSEs or the equivalent), by 19; and 48% reached level 3 (two A levels or the equivalent).

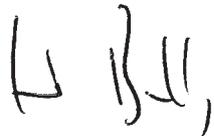
But we know that if we are to recognise fully the talents of every young person and equip them with the higher level skills they need to succeed in the global economy, we must also make fundamental changes to the 14-19 qualification offer. We need to do still more to attract increasing numbers of young people to learning, transform standards in the basics and in the wider skills for employability, and enable all young people to be taking qualifications that have a real standing with employers and the public at large, establishing a strong progression route to Further and Higher Education. This is an essential part of our plan to raise the education and training leaving age to 18 by 2015, so that all young people have the right skills to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world and can continue learning throughout life.

We have set out a very significant programme of reform for 14-19 education, with a new set of qualification opportunities at its heart. We are committed to delivering these reforms in practice, together with a range of key partners at every level.

This Strategy sets out the measures needed to ensure that, as we are developing new qualification options, we can make them as comprehensive as possible, to better meet the needs of all young people. It also seeks to detail the systemic changes that will be needed to bring the most valued of

existing qualifications into the offer of the future, whilst removing those options that confuse and complicate what is available. I would like to thank the members of our 14-19 Expert Group – made up of representatives of all parts of the education system – who have generously shared their views to inform our thinking.

As we begin to roll out our reforms this year, we want young people, parents, providers and awarding bodies to be clear about how we will deliver this change, so they can plan effectively for the future. As we take forward our reforms to 14-19 education, it is only through the commitment and support of awarding bodies, and of schools, colleges and training providers locally that we will see the improvements we all seek. I hope that you will share with us your views on our proposals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Balls'.

Ed Balls

Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Executive summary

Context

1. In our 2005 White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills*¹, we set out our plans to reform education and training for teenagers. Our ambition was then, and remains now, to create a system in which every young person can prepare themselves through education and training to make a success of their life.
2. At the centre of these plans was the reform of curriculum and qualifications. We said that we would create a qualifications system in which every young person can learn the right subject for them, at the right level for them, learning in a style that suits them – no matter where they are in the country – and achieve a valuable qualification if they succeed. Putting that in place, together with the right information, advice and guidance and the right personal and financial support arrangements, is a key part of our drive to raise participation in learning post-16 and attainment by 19.
3. At that time, there was much that was good in the qualifications system, but also some significant problems: there was a confusing ‘alphabet soup’ of vocationally-related qualifications, not well understood by many employers; some qualifications were dead-ends – they did not lead to any useful progression; many programmes of learning did too little to engender the broad learning and employability skills that are needed for life and work; and too few young people had access to qualifications which simultaneously engaged their interest, appealed to their learning style, and prepared them for life and work.
4. So, in that White Paper, we set out a wide ranging reform programme. We would develop a new curriculum for 11-14 year-olds which would be less prescriptive, so that schools could tailor learning to the young people in their classrooms, so that more young people could reach 14 well prepared to make choices. We would develop new functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and ICT which would be included within every qualification route for young people, so that all young people would have to learn to use English, mathematics and ICT in practice. We would develop a new framework of ‘personal, learning and thinking skills’ – the key skills such as the ability to communicate well and to work in a team which employers and universities consistently say they most want.

¹ 14-19 Education and Skills (2005)

5. We would ask employers and universities to lead in developing new Diploma qualifications in each of the key occupational sectors of the economy, mixing the best of theoretical and practical learning (including all the functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills), and make them available everywhere so that every young person has access to a mixed theoretical and practical route which is widely understood, recognised and valued and can take them into Higher Education (HE) or employment. We would reform and strengthen the general qualification (GCSE and A level) and Apprenticeship routes so that these well understood routes could be pillars of our new system. And we would develop a new Foundation Learning Tier of lower level (Entry level and level 1) qualifications, so that, for the first time, there would be good progression routes to higher level learning and qualifications for those now working at a lower level.
6. All this we have done or begun. The new secondary curriculum has been developed and will be taught for the first time in September. The functional skills qualifications have been developed. The personal, learning and thinking skills framework completed. The first Diplomas have been developed and will be taught for the first time in 144 consortia in 100 local authorities. The new A levels have been accredited for first teaching in September, and the Foundation Learning Tier will be piloted in September.
7. In the *14-19 Education and Skills White Paper*, we also said that we needed to create a qualifications system which was much more comprehensive, where every qualification available to young people was well understood by employers, HE and the general public. The key function of qualifications is to act as a passport to further learning and to work, through demonstrating what someone knows and can do. Qualifications which are not well understood cannot serve that purpose – and therefore we should create a simple system based on a few routes. In the White Paper we said that in future, as Diplomas become a national entitlement, public funding should be directed to just four routes: the general (GCSEs and A levels), the new Diplomas, Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier. In this document, we set out how we will move to achieve that vision.

Moving to a more comprehensive and coherent qualification offer

8. There are two key parts to our Strategy, which we have developed following advice from our independent 14-19 Expert Group, made up of representatives of all parts of the education sector and employers:
 - a new process for deciding which qualifications may be publicly funded in England, where qualifications outside the main pathways are funded only for as long as they meet the needs of a group of learners, employers or universities better than any within the main pathways can do; and
 - the continued development and refinement of the four key pathways to bring into these frameworks the best of what exists outside, to meet the needs of all learners, and to make them available nationally.

9. We set out our proposals in each of these areas in turn. We expect that in practice the short-term impact will be to remove from the framework a number of low uptake qualifications, but that funding will not be withdrawn from many existing free-standing qualifications before 2012, ahead of national entitlements to Diplomas, Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier in 2013.
10. We are ensuring a more comprehensive and coherent qualification offer. This will build on the strengths of the current system, but support better progression and lock in all the skills that young people need through a set of clear and well valued qualification choices. Through providing a broad structure, our national suites offer considerable opportunity to bring in the best of existing provision, for example some existing vocational qualifications such as BTECs and others.
11. The needs of young people will always come first. The benefit to young people of a simpler system is a key reason for this reform. However, for the same reason, we will continue to fund individual stand-alone qualifications outside of our national suites for as long as they meet a need not met elsewhere. Practical experience may show that there are some existing stand-alone qualifications which serve the needs of particular learners or are important to particular employers, and these needs cannot be met within the national suites. If a need can be clearly demonstrated, we will continue to make these qualifications available for young people.
12. As we take steps towards this long-term aim – as the Expert Group advised – we are committed to managing the change carefully, building a strong evidence base and listening to views, so that we can meet the needs of young people and employers in the future, and year-on-year as we go. To support this commitment, we plan to adopt new criteria against which to assess which qualifications can be taken by students in the maintained sector. In practice, these criteria will mean that we will cease to fund a qualification as a free-standing qualification if:
 - a. there are qualifications within the national suites which can meet the needs of young people, employers, universities and wider society as well as this qualification;
 - b. the effectiveness of the qualifications within the national suites in meeting these needs has been demonstrated in practice in a sufficiently wide range of circumstances; and
 - c. the qualifications within the national suites are nationally available.
13. We will establish a new external body – the Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval – made up of representatives of HE, employers and all parts of the education sector to advise the Secretary of State on whether qualifications meet these criteria.

Diplomas

14. Successfully developing and delivering the Diploma programme will be central to the future qualification offer. We know that this presents a new degree of challenge for all those involved in the education system. But it also offers a once in a generation opportunity to tackle the historic divide between academic and vocational learning.

15. Diplomas have a flexible structure which allows space for young people to choose options within their Diploma. To ensure that Diplomas offer the full range of choice to all young people, we are using this flexibility to bring the best of existing qualifications – for example some existing vocational qualifications such as BTECs, City and Guilds awards, OCR Nationals and others – into the Diploma structure. This optional element (known as Additional and Specialist Learning) means that there can be a wide range of choice within Diplomas.
16. In order to ensure that Diplomas can meet the needs of the widest possible group of learners, we have announced two further steps. First, we are expanding the Diploma programme to develop three new Diplomas in Science, Humanities and Languages from 2011. And we are following the advice of the 14-19 Expert Group, in introducing an extended Diploma at each level. Extended Diplomas will be very large and stretching qualifications, including a full Diploma but also requiring young people to complete some additional units.
17. To support access to these new options, we are introducing an entitlement to all 17 Diplomas (including Science, Languages and Humanities) for 16-18 year-old learners from 2013. And we will consider in 2013 whether the entitlement should be extended in this way for 14-16 year-old learners.

GCSEs and A levels

18. Each year hundreds of thousands of students, with the support of their teachers, work hard towards GCSEs and A levels. We are investing to make sure that these qualifications continue to be high-quality and relevant as the world young people live in changes. New GCSEs will ensure that content is up to date. And in English, mathematics and ICT, it is our policy that young people in England will need to achieve functional skills at level 2 before they can be awarded an A*-C grade at GCSE.
19. At A level we are making changes to ensure that assessment places even more emphasis on deep learning and the ability to make connections across a subject. We are introducing 'stretch and challenge' to assessments at A2, and an A* grade to reward the most exceptional performance. At the same time we are reducing the burden of assessment. We are introducing an Extended Project from September 2008. We want to consider how we might make the Extended Project an entitlement to all students studying at level 3, and how quickly that might be done.
20. To support the drive to ensure that the qualification offer available to young people is simple and deliverable, where we can we will remove options from the general qualifications offer that duplicate and add complexity. As we move towards 2013 and the national entitlement, we think that Diplomas will in practice duplicate the offer currently provided by Applied A levels, and will provide a stronger learning experience. We therefore expect that once Diplomas are available across the country from 2013, Applied A levels will no longer be needed as part of the qualification offer in England. We will withdraw Advanced Extension Awards – which will

overlap in purpose with the stretch and challenge being introduced at A level – when the new A levels come in this year.

21. We have committed to a first full review in 2013 to consider how Diplomas, GCSEs and A levels and any other general qualifications publicly funded for young people at that point, are combining to meet the needs of young people, employers and universities. The review will take evidence from the new Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval.

Apprenticeships

22. Apprenticeships enable young people in work to achieve high-quality qualifications which employers in their sector want – either at level 2 or at level 3. Securing more Apprenticeship places for young people is a key priority in our ambition to ensure that more 16-19 year-olds are participating in post-16 education or training.
23. We are making it easier for learning achieved through an Apprenticeship to count towards a Diploma (and vice versa). We believe there are clear benefits from this for learner transition and progression. We are committed to ensuring that all Apprenticeships offer appropriate progression routes, including to HE.

The Foundation Learning Tier

24. We agree with the Expert Group's view that the Foundation Learning Tier is crucial. It will provide, for the first time, clear routes (Progression Pathways) for young people working below level 2 to achieve combinations of qualifications at Entry level and level 1 that will prepare them fully for level 2 and beyond.
25. We will pilot the Foundation Learning Tier from September 2008. In this document, we are consulting on whether all young people learning at Entry level or level 1 should have access to an appropriate Progression Pathway within the Foundation Learning Tier.

Making it happen

26. The new independent regulator (the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, to be known as Ofqual) will have a key role to play in relation to 14-19 qualifications, ensuring that standards are maintained and that different qualifications are easily comparable.
27. A clear and transparent qualifications framework is key to enabling all qualifications to be well understood. We believe that moving to a single credit-based framework for all 14-19 qualifications – presenting them in a way that is easier to understand, through comparing not only the level but also the size of different qualifications – could have significant benefits for young learners, supporting progression from one route to another and into adult learning. We plan to put forward more detailed proposals on how we will move 14-19 qualifications onto a credit-based framework, with a view to completing this move by 2013.

28. The Expert Group underlined that every young person should receive the high-quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) that they need to help them make decisions about the learning and training choices that would best suit them. We must also make sure that every young person has the financial support they need to take up a learning place and remain in that learning. We are ensuring that the teachers and others who are key to making the changes work, have the support they need.

Next steps and consultation

29. This Strategy represents the Government's conclusions to date. We would welcome comments and views as we take this work forward. This Strategy applies to England only, although we recognise that a number of our proposals have implications for Wales and Northern Ireland, where shared qualifications will be affected. We will work collaboratively with our counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland to consider the impact of our proposals on our shared qualifications to ensure that the three-country framework is maintained.

Chapter 1: Introduction and context

- 1.1 In our 2005 White Paper *14-19 Education and Skills*², we set out our plans to reform education and training for teenagers. Our ambition was then, and remains now, to create a system in which every young person can prepare themselves through education and training to make a success of their life.
- 1.2 At the centre of these plans was the reform of curriculum and qualifications. We said that we would create a qualifications system in which every young person can learn the right subject for them, at the right level for them, learning in a style that suits them – no matter where they are in the country – and achieve a valuable qualification if they succeed. Putting that in place, together with the right information, advice and guidance and the right personal and financial support arrangements, is a key part of our drive to raise participation in learning post-16 and attainment by 19.
- 1.3 At that time, there was much that was good in the qualifications system, but also some significant problems. There was a confusing ‘alphabet soup’ of vocationally-related qualifications, not well understood by many employers. Some qualifications had currency in some sectors of the economy, but none enjoyed the same universal recognition and understanding as GCSEs and A levels, reflected in lower labour market returns. Too few young people had access to qualifications which simultaneously engaged their interest, appealed to their learning style, and prepared them for life and work. Many programmes of learning did too little to engender the broad learning and employability skills that are needed for life: the basics in English, mathematics and ICT and the skills to operate confidently, effectively and independently in study and work. Some qualifications were dead-ends – not leading learners, when they are ready, to the next level of learning or training. There was scope to improve progression to Higher Education (HE), to give young people the opportunity to gain higher level skills.

We set out clear goals to reform 14-19 qualifications

- 1.4 So, in that White Paper, we set out a wide ranging reform programme to address these challenges. We said that we needed to create a qualifications system which is much more

² 14-19 Education and Skills (2005)

comprehensive and where every qualification that young people take is well understood by employers, HE and the general public. The key function of qualifications is to act as a passport to further learning and to work, through demonstrating what someone knows and can do. Qualifications which are not well understood cannot serve that purpose – and therefore we should create a simple system based on a few routes.

1.5 We said that we would:

- Develop a new curriculum for 11-14 year-olds which would be less prescriptive, so that schools could tailor learning to the young people in their classrooms, so that more young people could reach 14 well prepared to make choices.
- Ask employers and universities to lead in developing new Diploma qualifications in each of the key occupational sectors of the economy, mixing the best of theoretical and practical learning.
- Develop functional skills qualifications so that all young people would have to learn to use English, mathematics and ICT in practice and a new framework of ‘personal, learning and thinking skills’ – the key skills such as the ability to communicate well and to work in a team.
- Reform and strengthen the general qualification (GCSE and A level) and Apprenticeship routes so that these well understood routes could be pillars of our new system.
- Develop a new Foundation Learning Tier of lower level (Entry level and level 1) qualifications, so that, for the first time, there would be good progression routes to higher level learning and qualifications for those now working at a lower level.

1.6 We said that in future, as Diplomas become a national entitlement, public funding should be directed to just four routes: the general (GCSEs and A levels), the new Diplomas, Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier. These options would be available to all learners across the country.

We have made significant progress in the last three years

1.7 Since we set out these proposals in 2005, much has happened to move us towards this goal. Diploma Development Partnerships led by the relevant Sector Skills Councils and bringing together wider stakeholders, are continuing to work to design the new Diplomas. Awarding bodies are turning this content into high-quality qualifications. We have announced our intention to expand the Diploma offer through introducing three new Diplomas in Science, Languages and Humanities, to be first available from 2011.

1.8 New A levels are being taught from September 2008, and new GCSEs from 2009. Functional skills qualifications are currently being piloted, before full availability across England from September 2010. All the Foundation Learning Tier Progression Pathways for 14-19 year-olds will be trialled from this September. The new Secondary Curriculum, which will be introduced from September 2008, will create more flexibility to stretch pupils and ensure that they are better prepared to succeed.

- 1.9** To underpin these changes, we are creating a new independent regulator of qualifications and tests to help maintain public confidence in the qualification system³. We have just finished consulting about our plans and will be announcing next steps shortly.
- 1.10** Local areas are driving preparation for Diploma delivery. At least one of the first five Diplomas will be taught in 144 groups (consortia) of schools and colleges from this September. From September 2009, 72% of secondary schools and 88% of colleges will offer Diplomas.
- 1.11** *Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver*, the recent consultation document on the new funding system⁴, explained the new role of local authorities from 2010 in commissioning and managing provision for 16-18 year-olds to ensure that the full range of programmes is made available to young people. As set out in the recent review, *World-Class Apprenticeships*⁵, this will include liaising with the new National Apprenticeship Service over the provision of Apprenticeship places to deliver the new entitlement to an Apprenticeship for each suitably-qualified young person from 2013.

We will now move to a new process for deciding the future public funding of qualifications, and to bring the best of what exists now into the national frameworks

- 1.12** As we move towards the national availability of the new offer in 2013, we set out in this Strategy how we will deliver the change from where we are now to the future qualification offer we proposed in 2005. Our approach has two key elements:
- a new process for deciding which qualifications may be publicly funded in England, where qualifications outside the main pathways are funded only for as long as they meet the needs of a group of learners, employers or universities better than any within the main pathways can do; and
 - the continued development and refinement of the four key pathways to bring into these frameworks the best of what exists outside, to meet the needs of all learners, and to make them available nationally.
- 1.13** We set out in this document our plans in each of these areas in turn. As we implement our reforms, we want young people, parents, providers and awarding bodies to be clear about how the change will take place, so they can plan most effectively for the future. As we make the change, we will ensure that we always put the needs of learners first. As we simplify the offer, we will make certain that there is a route that will serve the needs of each young person.
- 1.14** In developing this Strategy we have taken advice from our independent 14-19 Expert Group, made up of representatives of employers, HE and all parts of the education sector. Their advice has been very important in shaping our plans and we will continue to listen: delivering these changes will require contributions from a range of partners. We are committed to listening

3 Confidence in Standards: Regulating and developing qualifications and assessment (2007)

4 Raising Expectations: enabling the system to deliver (2008)

5 World-Class Apprenticeships: Unlocking Talent, Building Skills For All (2008)

carefully to the views and comments of all of our stakeholders, and encourage all of them to respond to this consultation.

- 1.15** This Strategy applies to England only, although we recognise that a number of our proposals have implications for Wales and Northern Ireland, with whom we share many of these qualifications. We remain committed to the concept of a three-country qualifications system. The administrations in the three countries share broadly the same aspirations for young people, and have in place policies and strategies to deliver their objectives. However, there may be instances where there are legitimate differences of view about how these are delivered. We will work collaboratively with our counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland to consider the impact of our proposals on our shared qualifications, including Apprenticeships.

Chapter 2: Moving to a more comprehensive and coherent qualification offer

Summary

This Strategy sets out a new process for deciding which qualifications may be publicly funded in England, where qualifications outside the main pathways are funded only for as long as they meet the needs of a group of learners, employers or universities better than any within the main pathways can do. We expect that in practice the short-term impact will be to remove from the framework a number of low uptake qualifications, but that funding will not be withdrawn from many existing free-standing qualifications before 2012, ahead of national entitlements to Diplomas, Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier in 2013.

As we take steps towards this long-term aim we are committed to managing the change carefully, building a strong evidence base and listening to views, so that we can meet the needs of young people and employers in the future, and year-on-year as we go. To support this commitment, we plan to adopt new criteria against which to assess which qualifications can be taken by students in the maintained sector. In practice, these criteria will mean that we will fund qualifications as free-standing qualifications outside of the national suites only if:

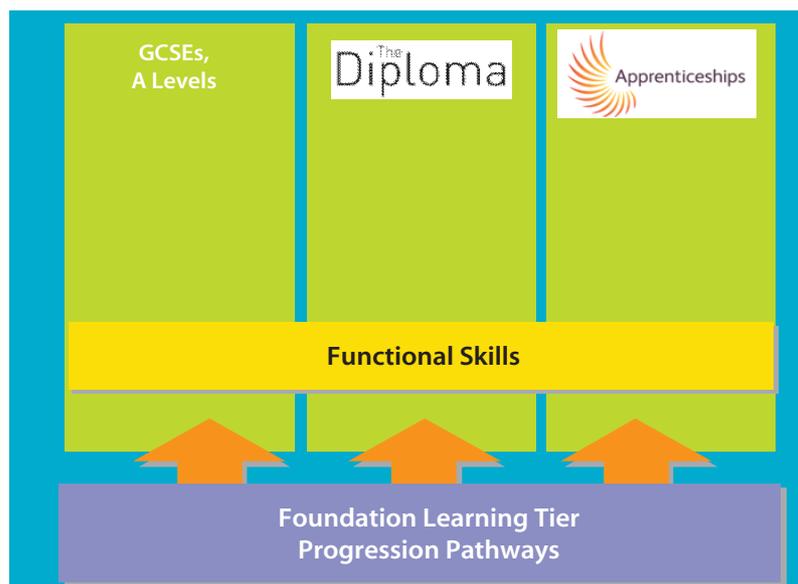
- a. they can meet the needs of young people, employers, universities and wider society, which cannot be met within the national suites;
- b. the effectiveness of the qualifications within the national suites in meeting these needs has been demonstrated in practice in a sufficiently wide range of circumstances; and
- c. the qualifications within the national suites are nationally available.

We will establish a new external body – the Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval – made up of representatives of Higher Education, employers and all parts of the education sector to advise the Secretary of State on whether qualifications meet these criteria.

- 2.1 The national suites and frameworks of GCSEs and A levels, Diplomas, Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier will provide, for the first time, a comprehensive and coherent qualification offer to better meet the needs of every young person in the future. The choices available will support a range of learning preferences, from the general to the occupationally specific. Local areas will have the responsibility to ensure that the full range of choices is made available.
- 2.2 As we develop these options, we are ensuring that they are made as comprehensive as possible. This will enable all qualifications taken by young people to be valued and understood, to be engaging and motivating, to secure the basics – including employability and learning

skills – and to be broad and flexible enough to take them where they want to go, whether that is into work, perhaps on an Apprenticeship or on to university.

14-19 key national suites and frameworks



- 2.3** Through providing a broad structure, these options offer considerable flexibility, including the opportunity to bring in the best of existing provision. This will mean that the most valued and popular content, for example some existing vocational qualifications such as BTECs, City and Guilds awards and others, can continue to be offered and branded within one of our three qualification suites. It will also mean that awarding bodies will have the flexibility to develop new, innovative content to continue to meet learner needs. We are working in particular with awarding bodies and other partners to do this through the development of the Diploma Additional and Specialist Learning component. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.
- 2.4** Practical experience may show that there are some existing stand-alone qualifications which serve the needs of particular learners or are important to particular employers, and that these needs cannot be met within the national suites and frameworks. Each qualification will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If a need is clearly demonstrated, we will continue to approve these qualifications for use, since the overriding priority will be to secure the interests of learners and employers.

We will move progressively towards the qualification offer of the future

- 2.5** In taking steps to achieve the ambition of a clear and simplified qualification offer, as our Expert Group recommended, it will be critical to draw on practical experience, build an evidence base and take views on the extent to which the new offer is meeting learner and employer needs. This will be crucial to ensure that we do not remove successful options without a suitable replacement, so that no learner is left without a suitable route to achievement, and to ensure that the skills needs of employers are met.

- 2.6** We agreed with the Expert Group's recommendation that before making a decision to cease to fund any existing qualification for 14-19 year-olds, there must be evidence that there is at least as good or a better offer available in one of the national suites and frameworks. A key measure of our success will be that every part of the education system has confidence that the new offer will meet the needs of young people, and is simple and deliverable in practice.
- 2.7** This commitment is reflected in new criteria against which it is proposed that the Secretary of State will assess whether qualifications should be approved for use for young people under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. This specifies which qualifications can be used by students in maintained schools, and for under 19 year-olds in Further Education and work-based training.
- 2.8** These new criteria set out that, to secure our objectives, as far as possible qualifications eligible for approval should fall within the set of national qualifications suites and frameworks. Defining the learning contained within these frameworks will primarily be the task of employers and Higher Education (HE), working in partnership with education providers and the new qualifications agency. Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) will represent the views of employers. The qualifications which are to constitute Apprenticeship frameworks will continue to be determined by SSCs.
- 2.9** In making decisions about the future of qualifications that fall outside of these suites, the criteria establish that we will consider: the extent to which the national suites and frameworks are able to meet the needs of learners, employers and HE; and whether the qualifications within the national suites are nationally available.
- 2.10** If a need is clearly demonstrated, we will continue to approve these qualifications, since the overriding priority will be to secure the interests of learners and employers. And there will still be the freedom for awarding bodies to develop new content if the evidence shows this is needed to meet learner needs. We will discuss with awarding bodies and others how this might work. We will make decisions on approval as qualifications come up for redevelopment and re-approval. The national qualification suites and frameworks are still under development and in the process of being implemented. It will not be until the full range of Diploma Additional and Specialist Learning is available, the new offer has been tested in practice by a wide range of learners, and full national access to the new offer is assured, that it will be possible to move fully to our long-term goal. It is for these reasons that we do not expect to cease approving existing stand-alone qualifications taken by significant numbers of young people (over 100) before 2012.
- 2.11** If at that point a decision is made not to continue to approve a qualification, we will ensure that the education system is given sufficient time to adapt to changes so that learners and providers are not disrupted. We are committed to continuing approval for a short period beyond the decision point, to enable institutions which have been offering that qualification to make a smooth transition to alternative qualifications.
- 2.12** In line with advice from our Expert Group, the principles presume that any further proliferation of the qualification offer is undesirable, given the potentially negative effect on public

understanding. However, we will continue to fund individual stand-alone qualifications outside our national suite if they meet a need not yet met elsewhere. To support our objective of a clear and credible qualification offer, we will also cease to approve any existing stand-alone qualification that has a very low take-up with young learners, except where it has a clear specialist purpose. This supports the work being undertaken through the Vocational Qualification Reform Programme to rationalise low take-up qualifications for adults.

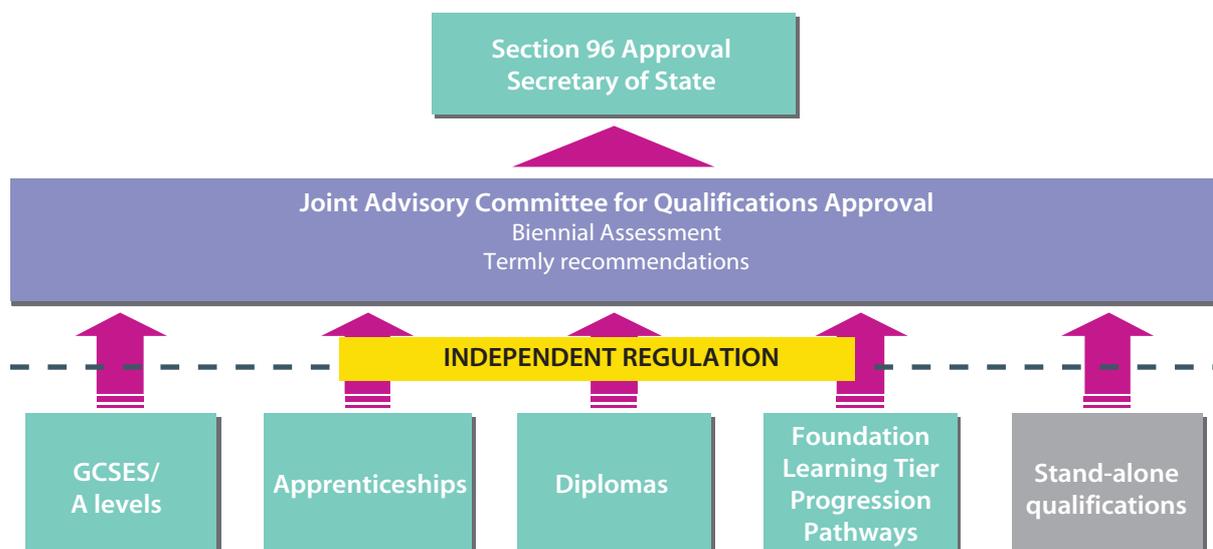
- 2.13** The new criteria are attached to this document as **Annex A**. These would be used after the consultation period has ended and once we have confirmed our plans.
- 2.14** The Learning and Skills Council (and then from 2010 the Young People’s Learning Agency) will continue to be responsible for advising on funding rates for qualifications and on the national funding formula.

We will establish a new committee to advise on approval of qualifications

- 2.15** To advise the Secretary of State on whether qualifications meet these criteria, we propose to establish a new independent body, a Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval. The Committee will bring together representatives of HE, business and all parts of the education sector to give a fully representative view. We will invite nominations for the committee membership. It will be convened by the new development agency for curriculum, assessment and qualifications and the Young People’s Learning Agency. It will consider on a regular basis all qualifications that are put forward by awarding bodies to be used by young people in the maintained sector. As the Expert Group recommended, it will assess each qualification on a case-by-case basis and make recommendations to the Secretary of State about their use.⁶ The final decision on qualification approval will remain with the Secretary of State.
- 2.16** In carrying out its functions, the Committee will be particularly mindful of the need to minimise burdens on the system, whilst retaining clear oversight of the qualification offer available to young people.

⁶ Approval of Apprenticeship frameworks is a matter for the relevant Sector Skills Council.

Proposed new Section 96 approval process



2.17 To support and inform its individual decisions, the Committee will also make biennial assessments of the overall 14-19 qualification offer. The first assessment will take place in 2009. These assessments will draw on the following evidence:

- the advice of the development agency for curriculum, assessment and qualifications, the Young People’s Learning Agency and Ofqual (on market impact);
- national and local information on participation and achievement;
- assessments of the availability of and access to the new qualification offer;
- the views of: awarding bodies; schools, colleges and other training providers; HE institutions; employers; and
- input from young people and parents.

2.18 To marshal and co-ordinate intelligence from employers to input into this process, we will ask SSCs to develop as part of their Sector Qualification Strategies specific strands about the learning and qualifications acquired and required by young people. Sector Qualification Strategies identify the current and future skills needs of sectors and analyse how provision will meet employer needs. In doing this, we will ask SSCs to have particular regard to occupationally specific and licence-to-practice qualifications which are outside or not widely available within Diplomas and Apprenticeship frameworks.

2.19 The assessments of the Committee will consider where there are learner needs that are not being met through existing qualifications and where innovative content might need to be developed.

2.20 The assessments will also consider the impact on the wider qualification market where there are shared qualifications, working collaboratively with the Devolved Administrations. This includes the qualification offer available to adult learners and that available in Northern Ireland and Wales. In taking decisions, the Secretary of State will consult the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Devolved Administrations.

2.21 The Committee will contribute evidence to the 2013 review of GCSEs and A levels. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

We will learn as we go

2.22 As we develop the new options, we know that we must test and refine our plans in the light of practical experience and feedback from practitioners, learners, employers and universities. This will enable us to ensure that all qualifications on offer to young people will meet needs year-on-year as we go. The phased implementation of Diplomas provides a particular opportunity to learn from the first phases of qualification development and apply this experience as development progresses.

As the new options are developed, they must be as comprehensive as possible

2.23 As we develop the new options, for this Strategy to work, we must ensure that they are made as comprehensive as possible, building on the strengths of the current system, but going further to better meet the needs of all young people. Our proposals are discussed further in Chapters 3 to 6.

Question: Do you agree with the aim to simplify the qualifications system and create a more comprehensive and coherent qualification offer for all young people?

Question: Do you agree with the new criteria against which decisions will be taken about qualification approval?

Chapter 3: Diplomas

Summary

Successfully developing and delivering the Diploma programme will be central to the future qualification offer. Diplomas have a flexible structure which allows space for young people to choose options within their Diploma. To ensure that Diplomas offer choice to all young people, we are using this flexibility to bring the best of existing qualifications into the Diploma structure. This optional element (known as Additional and Specialist Learning) means that there can be a wide range of choice within Diplomas.

In order to ensure that Diplomas can meet the needs of the widest possible group of learners, we have announced two further steps. First, we are expanding the Diploma programme to develop three new Diplomas in Science, Humanities and Languages from 2011. And we are following the advice of the 14-19 Expert Group, in introducing an extended Diploma at each level. Extended Diplomas will be very large and stretching qualifications, including a full Diploma, but also requiring young people to complete some additional units.

To support access to these new options, we are introducing an entitlement to all 17 Diplomas (including Science, Languages and Humanities) for 16-18 year old learners from 2013. And we will consider in 2013 whether the entitlement should be extended in this way for 14-16 year olds learners.

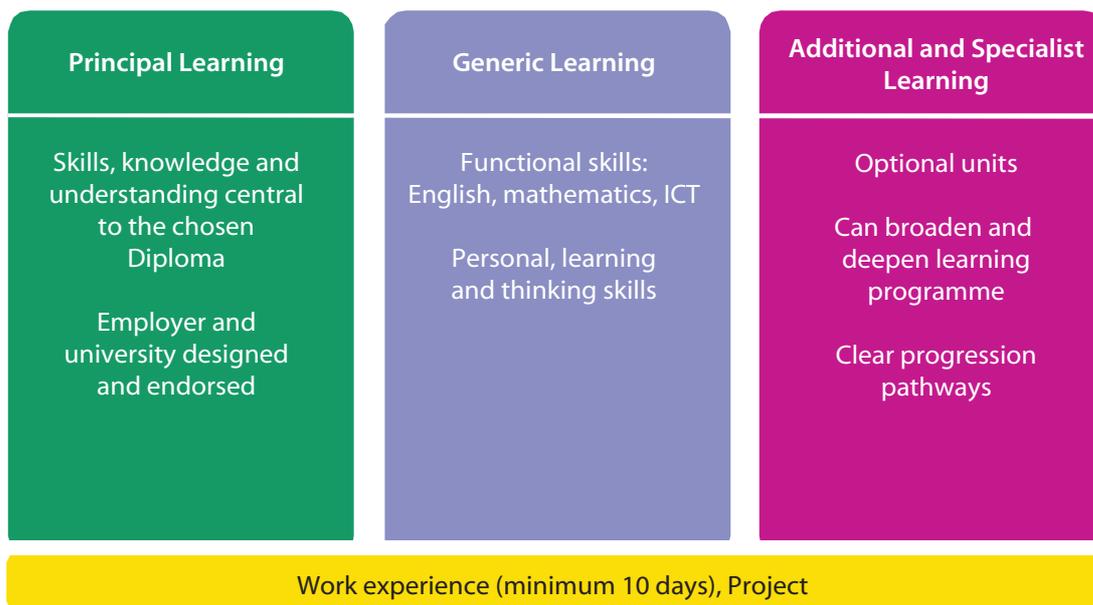
- 3.1** Successfully developing and delivering the Diploma programme will be central to the future qualification offer. We know that this presents a new degree of challenge for all those involved in the education system. But it also offers a once in a generation opportunity to deliver the very best for all our young people, finally tackling the historic divide between academic and vocational learning, and ensuring that we can deliver our ambition for all young people to remain in learning until they are 18.

We have made good progress in developing Diplomas

- 3.2** We have already made good progress in developing and delivering our aim set out three years ago: to develop a new set of high-quality nationally recognised qualifications which provide the flexibility to combine theoretical study and practical skills, with clear progression routes to further learning and training.
- 3.3** We have put employers and universities in the lead in designing Diplomas, to ensure that the achievements of young people will be widely recognised, and that they will give young people

the opportunities they are looking for. Built to the same coherent design, all Diplomas can be clearly understood. But because they are broad qualifications comprising a number of different components, they can also offer considerable flexibility so that young people can make choices about what to study to match their interests, aptitudes and aspirations.

Diploma design



- 3.4** Each Diploma is centred around a group of closely related disciplines, from Engineering to Sport and Leisure. The Diploma Principal Learning offers breadth across these disciplines, enabling young people to keep their options open. For example, Construction and the Built Environment is concerned not only with the traditional building industries, but also with planning, architecture and sustainable development. The Diploma design means that each qualification includes skills and knowledge across a coherent programme. So, the Creative and Media Diploma is designed thematically to bridge the processes common to all creative industries.
- 3.5** Diploma learning is underpinned by the opportunity for all young people to have developed the essential Generic Learning skills in preparation for successful employment and further study. This means the functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT, that allow individuals to work confidently, effectively and independently. And it also means the personal, learning and thinking skills, such as the ability to communicate well and to work in a team, to research and undertake independent study.
- 3.6** Each Diploma also allows considerable flexibility through the Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) Component for learners to make individual choices to personalise their courses of study. These choices may include existing qualifications.
- 3.7** Diplomas will offer a ladder of opportunity so that young people have access to engaging and meaningful learning programmes matched to their needs. Each Diploma will be available at three different levels:
- Foundation – equivalent to five GCSEs at grades D to G.

- Higher – equivalent to seven GCSEs at grades A* to C.
- Advanced – equivalent to three and a half A levels. There will also be a Progression Diploma – equivalent to two and a half A Levels.

3.8 Diplomas are attracting significant support from leading universities, and the universities admissions service, UCAS, has allocated tariff points so that the Advanced Diploma is equivalent to three and a half A levels. Diplomas will also offer learners a new route into skilled employment through an Apprenticeship.

3.9 144 consortia will begin delivering one or more of the first five Diploma lines from September 2008. A further 317 consortia in 136 local authorities in England will be delivering Diplomas from September 2009.

We will bring the best of existing qualifications within the Diploma framework

3.10 The ASL component offers considerable flexibility to bring the best of what currently exists into the Diploma structure. We will integrate this provision into Diplomas as we develop and roll out the new qualifications so that ASL choices can offer young people a range of options, from the general to the highly occupationally specific and vocational.

3.11 Through the Diploma Development Partnerships (DDPs) we are working with awarding bodies and other key partners (such as Higher Education (HE)) to review and evaluate existing qualifications and agree how they can best be made available as ASL options, to support progression opportunities and learner choice.

3.12 The Additional and Specialist Learning component offers the opportunity to bring in the strengths of existing general qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels. It also allows existing vocational qualifications to be included in the Diploma framework. This is key to building on the best of existing vocational provision. We know that this motivates many young people to achieve and progress. In many instances existing qualifications will require little or no change to be offered within the Diploma. Some existing vocational qualifications will need to be reconfigured to ensure that they do not duplicate Principal Learning and are of an appropriate size.

3.13 So for example, a student studying for an Advanced Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment could take A level mathematics and AS Level Art as ASL, perhaps as preparation for an Architecture course at university. A student who preferred more practical study might do a level 3 BTEC Certificate in Housing, specialising in sustainable communities, to prepare for a university course in Social Work. The Diploma transcript will record all qualifications which a young person has gained.

3.14 DDPs for the fourth phase Diplomas (Languages, Science and Humanities) will have an important role in developing flexible additional qualifications to complement each of the Diplomas as part of ASL. These may be drawn from existing qualifications, including GCSEs and A levels.

- 3.15** There will also be some instances where DDPs, working closely with employers and universities, identify requirements for skills and knowledge which are not currently being met through the existing qualifications offer. In these instances, DDPs will work with awarding bodies to take forward development of new qualification content and submit these to the regulator to accredit as new ASL qualifications. The development of such new qualifications will form an important part of our wider ambition to evaluate, update and improve the Diploma offer continuously. This development was particularly welcomed by the 14-19 Expert Group.
- 3.16** For example, a new mathematics qualification at level 3 is being developed for Engineering by a task force drawn from professional bodies including the Royal Academy of Engineering and the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics. The qualification sets mathematics within a realistic and authentic engineering context, providing learners with vital experience of solving real engineering problems. Responding to demands from employers and universities for language qualifications delivered within Diplomas, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has consulted on criteria for new applied language qualifications for inclusion as ASL components.
- 3.17** As the development of ASL options progresses, particular attention will be paid to ensuring that the Diploma catalogue – which lists all the qualifications available to Diploma learners – contains options to support progression from Foundation Learning Tier provision to Diplomas. Options to support progression from Diplomas into Apprenticeships will also be included.
- 3.18** We are working with the DDPs and QCA, the HE sector and other key partners, to identify clear pathways from Diplomas into HE, employment and Apprenticeships. The pathways will be used to help inform the development of appropriate information, advice and guidance material to help learners, providers and parents to understand which qualifications are best suited to support progression to particular destinations.
- 3.19** Currently a large number of level 3 qualifications attract points in the UCAS tariff. To support the opportunity for progression to HE for all Advanced Diploma learners, we are working with UCAS to ensure all level 3 qualifications contained as ASL attract tariff points.
- 3.20** Diplomas are new qualifications and the range of ASL is not yet complete. We are working closely with the awarding bodies, the DDPs, and QCA to develop a truly comprehensive choice of specialist options. We expect this number to significantly increase over time as each new Diploma becomes available. The Diploma catalogue will be updated termly as new qualifications are developed.

The Young Apprenticeship will continue as a work-focused programme in Key Stage 4

- 3.21** The development of ASL options will also support delivery of Young Apprenticeships with Diplomas as the underpinning qualifications. The Young Apprenticeship programme offers around 9,000 14-16 year-old pupils a year in selected areas the opportunity to take industry-specific learning programmes linked to vocational qualifications and extended work experience. Ofsted have reported 'raised achievement' and that 'employers saw significant benefits for

themselves and for the students'. There is also evidence of good progression to and high retention rates in post-16 Apprenticeships. We are clear that we want to retain the strong features of Young Apprenticeships within the Diploma framework, particularly the requirement for extended periods of work experience and the Young Apprenticeship brand.

- 3.22** From this September we will be piloting delivery of Young Apprenticeships with Diplomas as the underpinning qualifications with guidance from Sector Skills Councils helping to define the ASL options that should be included, as well as characteristics of projects and work experience. With the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills we will carefully evaluate the success of these pilots, including considering the impact on progression into post-16 Apprenticeships.

We are extending the Diploma offer

- 3.23** The new Diplomas in Science, Languages and Humanities will ensure that more young people have the opportunity to benefit from the Diploma experience. We have taken advice from our Expert Group on the design principles for these qualifications and on the most effective structures through which to develop them. We are now establishing multi-agency Diploma Development Partnerships to develop the new content. As with the first 14 Diplomas, these will bring together employers, HE, learning providers and subject bodies to ensure that the new qualifications meet learner needs.
- 3.24** Following the advice of the Expert Group, we have committed to introduce a new extended Diploma across all 17 lines of learning at each level to recognise and reward larger programmes of learning. At Advanced level, the extended Diploma will provide recognition of the scale and demand of programmes that are larger than the Advanced Diploma. We expect that it will be equivalent in size to around four and a half A levels. At Key Stage 4, an extended Foundation and Higher Diploma will recognise achievement of more of the core curriculum. We expect that the extended Foundation Diploma would be equivalent in size to around seven GCSEs at grades D to G, and that the extended Higher Diploma would be the equivalent of around nine GCSEs at grades A* to C.
- 3.25** Across all levels, the extended Diploma will include a strengthened core. It will also encompass a further Additional and Specialist Learning component to recognise further breadth and depth in learning, including in science or an entitlement area at Key Stage 4. As currently, the options could include existing qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels.
- 3.26** At Advanced level, the additional English or mathematics learning may be in qualifications specially designed to support the line of learning. There are already a range of existing qualifications in mathematics and English at level 3, often with a specific purpose, and we will need to consider carefully the extent to which they could be used in this context.
- 3.27** Across all levels, Diploma learners will be given the opportunity to take qualifications at a higher level within the Additional and Specialist Learning component. This might include, for example, taking AS levels or level 3 vocational awards as part of the Higher Diploma. To support this opportunity at Advanced level, we think there would be benefits – particularly for those

students taking the extended Diploma – in developing a standardised set of level 4 units across all Diploma lines.

We will extend the Diploma entitlement

- 3.28** In the future we want every young person in a school or college to have an entitlement to pursue any of the Diploma lines at an appropriate level for them, wherever they are in the country. By 2013 we have said that all students will be able to choose one of the first 14 Diplomas.
- 3.29** It is important that students can have the opportunity to take any of the 17 Diplomas in the future. We want to ensure that this can happen as soon as possible. Differences in how young people typically access provision pre- and post-16 will mean that we need to extend the entitlement in a staged process. We think that extending the Diploma entitlement to all 17 Diplomas pre-16 now would pre-judge the future of GCSEs. We will therefore consider in 2013 whether the entitlement should also be extended to include all 17 Diplomas for 14-16 year-olds at Key Stage 4.
- 3.30** However, for 16-18 year-old students, who have more flexibility to travel to access provision in a local area, we propose that the national entitlement should be extended to include all 17 Diplomas from 2013.

Question: Do you agree with our approach to bringing the best of the existing qualification offer within Diploma Additional and Specialist Learning?

Chapter 4: Reformed GCSEs and A levels

Summary

Each year hundreds of thousands of students, with the support of their teachers, work hard towards GCSEs and A levels. We are investing to make sure that these qualifications continue to be high-quality and relevant as the world young people live in changes. New GCSEs will ensure that content is up to date. And in English, mathematics and ICT, it is our policy that young people in England will need to achieve functional skills at level 2 before they can be awarded an A*-C grade at GCSE.

At A level we are making changes to ensure that assessment places even more emphasis on deep learning and the ability to make connections across a subject. We are introducing 'stretch and challenge' to assessments at A2, and an A* grade to reward the most exceptional performance. At the same time, we are reducing the burden of assessment. We are introducing an Extended Project from September 2008. We want to consider how we might make the Extended Project an entitlement to all students studying at level 3, and how quickly that might be done.

To support the drive to ensure that the qualification offer available to young people is simple and deliverable, where we can we will remove options from the general qualifications offer that duplicate and add complexity. As we move towards 2013 and the national entitlement, we think that Diplomas will in practice duplicate the offer currently provided by Applied A levels, and will provide a stronger learning experience. We therefore expect that once Diplomas are available across the country from 2013, Applied A levels will no longer be needed as part of the qualification offer in England. We will withdraw Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) – which will overlap in purpose with the stretch and challenge being introduced at A level – when the new A levels come in this year.

We have committed to a first full review in 2013 to consider how Diplomas, GCSEs and A levels, and any other general qualifications publicly funded for young people at that point, are combining to meet the needs of young people, employers and universities. The review will take evidence from the new Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval.

- 4.1** GCSEs and A levels will continue to be important in the lives of many young people. We are investing to make sure that they continue to be high-quality and relevant qualifications as the world young people live in changes.

GCSEs will be revised so that young people are well prepared for the future

- 4.2** To ensure that content is up to date, new GCSEs in most subjects will be taught from September 2009 which will complement the revisions to the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. The new GCSEs will be more relevant and encourage innovative teaching, learning and

assessment. The GCSE criteria – which define the skills and knowledge students need to learn – have been revised following consultation and awarding bodies will shortly be submitting new specifications for accreditation by Ofqual. The exceptions to this timetable are English, English literature, ICT and mathematics which are being redeveloped to be taught from September 2010. Science GCSEs, which were changed as recently as 2006, are also not currently under review. The revised GCSEs will introduce controlled assessment, with greater control on task setting, task taking and task marking. This responds to concerns about the rigour of coursework.

- 4.3** So that young people, employers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can be assured that an individual has gained the skills in mathematics, English and ICT they need to use in the real world, it is our policy that, in order to get grade A*–C in the new GCSEs in these subjects, learners in England will also need to demonstrate level 2 functional skills. The new GCSEs will be developed, alongside the functional skills pilot, for first teaching in 2010. The specifications for these new GCSEs will be available in the autumn term of 2009.

We are strengthening A levels

- 4.4** The changes being made at A level will ensure that assessment places even more emphasis is on deep learning and the ability to make connections across a subject. We are introducing ‘stretch and challenge’ to assessments at A2 to prepare students for the skills required in higher education and employment. This means there will be fewer structured questions; more open-ended questions which require extended essay responses; and more questions which require a synoptic overview of the subject. We are also introducing an A* grade to reward the most exceptional performance. This will not change the A grade standard, but will be awarded to those who get an A grade overall and achieve exceptionally well in their A2 units. The first A* award will be in 2010. At the same time we are reducing the burden of assessment. We are moving from 6 assessment units to 4 in the majority of subjects. There will be no reduction in A level content or standard.
- 4.5** We are introducing an Extended Project from September 2008. This will consist of a single extended piece of work which requires a high degree of planning, preparation, research and autonomous work, providing valuable additional evidence for entry to Higher Education (HE). The Extended Project will be a compulsory part of the Advanced Diploma and will also be available as a free-standing qualification to be taken alongside A level. HEIs have been very positive about the potential for the Extended Project to give the opportunity for applicants to demonstrate the sorts of wider study and research skills that they are looking for.
- 4.6** The feedback from the Extended Project pilots and from other schools and colleges indicates that many young people will have the opportunity to do an Extended Project from September. To support this, over the coming months a programme of workforce training and support materials will be provided to schools and colleges, utilising the experiences of those involved in the pilots.

4.7 To support HEIs to include the Extended Project as part of their admissions process without the risk of disadvantaging any learners, we want to make sure it is available to all. The Project will be an integral part of Advanced Diplomas and so available in all consortia from 2013. We shall use the evaluation evidence from the current pilots to judge how we might make it effectively an entitlement to all students studying at level 3, and how quickly that might be done – looking at the impact on teachers and institutions.

We will encourage simplicity and coherence

- 4.8** To support the drive to ensure that the qualification offer is simple and deliverable, where we can we will remove options from the general qualifications offer that duplicate and add complexity.
- 4.9** Currently, Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) are taken by a small number of learners in a limited number of subjects. In practice these will overlap in purpose with the stretch and challenge being introduced into A level, and will detract from the clarity of the offer. Our Expert Group has therefore advised that we work with awarding bodies to withdraw them when the new A levels come in, from this September. We expect that the last exams will be taken in 2009.
- 4.10** We want to make sure that all young people have access to a suitable applied option. Currently, Applied A levels are available as AS, single and double awards in a small number of disciplines. There were around 39,000 Applied A levels taken last year. Applied GCSEs are available in a wider range of subjects as double awards. They remain a popular offer for young people who want to try out practical learning, with around 145,000 Applied GCSEs taken last year.
- 4.11** As the Diploma lines at level 3 are developing, this is showing that in practice there is likely to be significant overlap between Diploma Principal Learning and some Applied A level qualifications. As we move towards 2013 and the national entitlement, we think that Diplomas will in practice duplicate the offer currently provided by Applied A levels, and will provide a stronger learning experience. And Diplomas will offer the opportunity for learners to add general learning – including A levels – or specialist learning to their programme. We therefore expect that once Diplomas are available across England from 2013, Applied A levels will no longer be needed as part of the qualification offer in England. The Devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland will separately consider the position of Applied A levels in those countries.
- 4.12** There are differences in the case of Applied GCSEs, which will continue to provide a distinct offer for those who do not choose to pursue a Diploma. At levels 1 and 2, Diplomas will provide a much larger programme of study than Applied GCSEs, with the opportunity to take stronger practical components. We therefore expect that Applied GCSEs will remain a distinct offer in the future. However, as we move towards 2013 and Diplomas begin to be established, there are clear benefits in aligning the content of Applied GCSEs, where appropriate, with the Principal Learning content of Diplomas. This will provide a clearer progression route for those learners who chose to move onto further study through a Diploma. We will ask the development

agency for curriculum, assessment and qualifications, when it next revises GCSE criteria in 2012, to consider how changes could support this.

- 4.13** The IB is a well-respected international advanced-level qualification. It can suit well those students who want to study a broad range of subjects and who want to pursue a very large programme. It is taken by a relatively small number of students in England (around 2,200 last year, compared to around 250,000 who took A levels), but for those students can provide a good progression route to HE. In 2006, we said that we would like to widen the choice of routes available to young people by having one maintained school in each local authority area outside London offer the IB. Since then, we have received proposals from local authorities for some 70 schools and colleges to proceed to authorisation to offer the IB, having first been part of a successful consortium which has passed through the Diploma Gateway. We can confirm that we will fund these institutions through the authorisation process.
- 4.14** This will mean that, together with other authorisations that have taken place, areas which were already offering the IB and the London arrangement in which a few institutions will make an offer for an area wider than a single local authority, there will be institutions offering the IB across the country. We have now taken advice on next steps from the Expert Group. Their view is that, as we now have 17 Diplomas, covering the full range of subject areas, and, given their advice that we develop the Extended Diploma, which will serve well those who wish to pursue a very large programme, we should now focus on promoting the national entitlement to these Diplomas, rather than seeking to push less enthusiastic institutions to offer the IB. We therefore intend that, having secured wider access across the country, the IB should now again be treated in an identical way to other accredited qualifications: institutions will be free to come forward to be authorised by the IB Organisation to offer the IB, but the Government will not pay the costs of authorisation, except where a commitment has already been made.

We will review the 14-19 qualification offer in 2013

- 4.15** In setting out the qualifications we expect will be available to young people in the future, this Strategy in no way prejudices the outcome of the 2013 review of GCSEs and A levels. We have committed to a first full review in 2013 to consider how in practice Diplomas, GCSEs and A levels, and any other general qualifications publicly funded for young people at that point, are combining to meet the needs of young people, employers and universities. The review will consider how deliverable this set of qualifications is as a whole – with a view to making proposals on how to remove duplication and fill any gaps. The review will take evidence from the new Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications Approval.
- 4.16** We want the qualification suites to be comprehensive in meeting the needs of young people, but also simple and deliverable, avoiding duplication. So, within our proposed new criteria for section 96, there is a presumption against starting to approve (as free-standing qualifications outside the national suites) qualifications which have not previously been approved, unless the new qualification would meet the needs of a group of learners, employers or HEIs whose needs cannot be met within the national suites or frameworks.

4.17 There are of course a number of other general qualifications already in use or that schools are preparing to deliver, such as the IB. When these stand-alone general qualifications come up for reaccreditation, it will be for Ofqual to consider whether they meet its criteria for accreditation. If they do, we will consider against the revised criteria for Section 96, the extent to which they fill a gap in the offer in the maintained sector, and therefore whether we should continue to fund young people to take them. Where we do continue to fund them, we shall include consideration of their future alongside GCSEs and A levels as part of the 2013 review.

Question: In seeking to make the Extended Project available to all learners, what particular issues need to be resolved?

Question: Do you agree with our proposed approach to:

a) Applied GCSEs

b) Applied A levels

Chapter 5: The Apprenticeship programme

Summary

Apprenticeships enable young people in work to achieve high-quality qualifications which employers in their sector want – either at level 2 or at level 3. Securing more Apprenticeship places for young people is a key priority in our ambition to ensure that more 16-19 year-olds are participating in post-compulsory education.

We are making it easier for learning achieved through an Apprenticeship to count towards a Diploma (and vice versa). We believe there are clear benefits from this for learner transition and progression. We are committed to ensuring that all Apprenticeships offer appropriate progression routes, including to Higher Education (HE).

- 5.1** Apprenticeships offer an attractive opportunity for those 16-18 year olds who learn most successfully in work-based learning environments and who have a clear idea about the particular job role they want, to develop their talents. There is strong evidence from wage returns that Apprenticeships are good investments for young people – at level 2 and at level 3. An Apprenticeship is not a qualification in its own right, but offers a broad framework of learning comprising wider core skills and occupationally specific training. The national certificate which apprentices receive on completion of the framework gives learners and employers reliable proof of their achievements.
- 5.2** Securing more Apprenticeship places for young people is a key priority in our ambition to ensure that more 16-19 year-olds are participating in post-compulsory education. In the recent report *World Class Apprenticeships* we committed that we will give every young person who is suitable and who wants one an entitlement to an Apprenticeship by 2013. We have proposed a new delivery system, with a new National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) at its centre, which will be key to delivering the entitlement. Fully functional from April 2009, the NAS will have significant staffing and expertise to work closely with 14-19 Partnerships and local authorities.

We are reforming Apprenticeship frameworks so that Apprenticeships remain a world-class product for all learners

- 5.3** Through the choice of frameworks on offer, Apprenticeships give young people considerable flexibility. There are at present 180 frameworks across 80 sectors. As we are expanding their

availability, we are reforming Apprenticeship frameworks – the programme of learning for each Apprenticeship – so that Apprenticeships can remain a world-class product for all learners.

- 5.4 To ensure that the training within each Apprenticeship programme is relevant to today's business needs, the content of each framework is currently designed by Sector Skills Councils and their employers. To meet our targets for expansion of the Apprenticeship programme, we think that we need to go further to secure a significant and rapid increase in the number of Apprenticeship frameworks available. We have proposed a quicker and more responsive approach through which Apprenticeship frameworks would come into existence in the future, including the opportunity to integrate an employer's own qualifications or units within the framework.

Apprenticeship frameworks will include the broad skills employers want

- 5.5 So that each framework secures all of the skills that young people need, the Apprenticeship blueprint (agreed for all Apprenticeships in England and Wales) sets out clear design principles against which all frameworks are developed, specifying, for example, that each Apprenticeship must contain a knowledge-based element (the theoretical knowledge underpinning a job in a certain occupation and industry) and a competence-based element (the ability to discharge the functions of a certain occupation). We think there is more we can do to strengthen the Apprenticeship experience through a new Apprenticeship blueprint.
- 5.6 We have proposed specifying through the blueprint that all Apprenticeships must secure the basics, through requiring the functional English and mathematics at the same level as that required in Higher and Advanced Diplomas (level 2 functional skills). We also want to incorporate generic employability skills in all frameworks. As with Diplomas, we have said that this is best achieved through integrating these skills in the main knowledge and skills of the Apprenticeship, rather than teaching them through stand-alone units. We expect that these changes will be made as existing qualifications come up for re-accreditation. This will match the focus within Diplomas, to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to develop the skills employers want.

There will be good progression routes into and out of Apprenticeships

- 5.7 To support those young people who fail to meet the suitably qualified threshold, but have expressed an interest in an Apprenticeship, there will be the guaranteed option of a place on a programme which will improve their employability as a potential Apprentice. In the future we expect that this programme will be the progression pathway to skilled work in the Foundation Learning Tier (discussed further in Chapter 6).
- 5.8 Those young people who are clear about the occupation they wish to enter but cannot yet access an Apprenticeship place will be able to pursue Apprenticeship programme learning at school or college full-time. As stated in *World-Class Apprenticeships*, such learners will count as

apprentices only if they are subsequently employed as apprentices. We will ensure that the performance management of the system is based on completion of the full Apprenticeship framework (or at least as much as is possible without being in employment) and progression to an employed Apprenticeship.

- 5.9** Apprenticeships offer good progression routes to further learning and training. In line with our work on Diplomas, we are committed to ensuring the availability of appropriate progression routes from all Apprenticeships, particularly to higher education. We want the new Apprenticeship blueprint to require all frameworks to address with absolute clarity how progression to the next level of training will be achieved in practice. In Chapter 3, we outlined our plans to work with UCAS to include all Additional and Specialist Learning options in the UCAS tariff, to support Diplomas being a route to higher education where required. We have committed to ask the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to work with UCAS to extend the mapping of Apprenticeship frameworks to UCAS tariff points to include all frameworks.

There will be straightforward progression routes between Diplomas and Apprenticeships

- 5.10** Whilst remaining clear that Apprenticeships and Diplomas have different learning objectives, we do want to make sure that, as far as possible, there is clarity about how the qualifications within Apprenticeships and Diplomas relate, to support young people progressing to the next level of learning or switching from one qualification choice to another.
- 5.11** We intend that Diplomas will provide clear progression routes into Apprenticeships and, indeed, are likely to contain Apprenticeship components within their content where specified by the relevant Sector Skills Councils within the Diploma Development Partnerships. As outlined in Chapter 3, in developing the Diploma Additional and Specialist Learning catalogue, we are making it possible to readily identify what Specialist learning options will be most appropriate for progression onto an Apprenticeship or an Advanced Apprenticeship in a particular sector.
- 5.12** By including Apprenticeship component qualifications in the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) (this is discussed further in Chapter 7) we intend that in future it will be possible for learning in a Diploma to count towards an Apprenticeship (and vice versa). For example, someone with a Diploma wishing to undertake an Apprenticeship would already have acquired functional skills and personal learning and thinking skills. Depending on his or her choice of Additional and Specialist learning, the individual may also have a relevant competence qualification. This would leave just a qualification covering the knowledge-based element and employment rights and responsibilities to be completed.
- 5.13** Similarly, an apprentice who wanted to gain a Diploma may already have completed the Additional and Specialist Learning component, much of the Generic Learning component and some of the Principal Learning. The QCF will allow learners to see where they will need to 'top-up' their learning to gain a Diploma alongside the completion of the Apprenticeship framework.

- 5.14** The QCF will enable learning acquired through the pathway to skilled work (including Apprenticeships) within the Foundation Learning Tier to be aligned with those qualifications and units required in an Apprenticeship programme, supporting learner progression.

Question: How can we best support progression between Diplomas and Apprenticeships?

Chapter 6: The Foundation Learning Tier

Summary

We agree with the Expert Group's view that the Foundation Learning Tier is crucial. It will provide, for the first time, clear routes (Progression Pathways) for young people working below level 2 to achieve combinations of qualifications at Entry level and level 1 that will prepare them fully for level 2 and beyond.

We will pilot the Foundation Learning Tier from September 2008. In this document, we are consulting on making the main Progression Pathways for 14-19 year-olds an entitlement for all young people working below level 2.

- 6.1** Through this Strategy we have set out our commitment to ensuring that all young people have a route through which they can learn, develop and prepare themselves for working life. For the most vulnerable young people this is of particular importance, and will be a major focus of our work as we implement our proposals to raise the participation age.
- 6.2** Some learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, who have skills gaps, or who for whatever reason have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education or training will take qualifications at Entry level or level 1. These qualifications can then be used as a springboard for moving on to further achievement at level 2, the stepping stone to Further Education and employability. For some of these learners, particularly some of those with learning difficulties or disabilities, reaching level 1 is a major achievement in itself and deserves recognition.
- 6.3** Currently, although there are some high-quality qualifications available at lower levels, too many do not have clear progression routes. Gaps in provision mean that some learners cannot access accreditation for their learning and some are following qualifications which are not designed to meet their specific needs. Foundation Diplomas will be part of the answer. But there is also a need to provide a route for those young people who want to access an Apprenticeship but do not meet the entry requirements, and a wider need for better Entry level provision.
- 6.4** The Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) is being developed by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – working with a large number of providers, awarding bodies and Sector Skills Councils – to transform the learning experience for young people (and adults) working at Entry level and level 1. It will support the motivating learning experiences being developed for disengaged learners through the Key Stage 4 engagement

programme, by giving access to high-quality, accredited qualifications. It will build on existing successful programmes such as Entry to Employment.

New 'Progression Pathways' will offer clear stepping stones to aid progression

- 6.5** A key feature of the Foundation Learning Tier is the creation of Progression Pathways. The Pathways are not qualifications themselves; they are frameworks for learning built from a combination of qualifications. They will give providers a more coherent set of options and opportunities, which are easier to navigate. The requirements of each Pathway will be flexible enough to allow providers to tailor the learning programme to individual interests and skill levels, providing flexibility both in terms of the pace of learning and where the learning leads. This is particularly important to suit the needs and aspirations of the range of learners at this level.
- 6.6** The units and qualifications within the Pathways will be drawn from the Qualifications and Credit Framework. All of the Pathways will lead to credit-based qualifications which will be built up from manageable units – enabling learners to learn in smaller steps where appropriate, building up learning and confidence as they go, and giving them tangible evidence of their achievements.

Progression Pathways will provide the right skills to help young people to develop, learn and progress

- 6.7** Each Progression Pathway will provide a balance of functional skills (in English, mathematics and ICT); personal, learning and thinking skills; and subject and vocational learning. All vocational qualifications will have been designed with employers to make sure that young people develop the specific skills they are looking for. The weighting of these combinations will depend on the requirements of the Pathway and the learner's starting point, aims and aspirations. The different elements of the programme can be at different levels to suit the needs of the individual learner.
- 6.8** To maximise the potential for learners to progress, the credits accumulated by learners may count towards other qualifications or destinations – such as Diplomas or Apprenticeships – that they might want to take in the future.
- 6.9** The Pathways are built around a philosophy of robust initial assessment, ongoing review, target setting and individual advice and support. They are supported by a set of principles for delivery, which inform providers about good practice in delivering teaching and learning at these levels.
- 6.10** There are three Progression Pathways for 14-19 year-olds.

Foundation Diploma or GCSE Pathway

This Pathway will support all 14-19 year-olds who are working predominately at Entry level and will also include the potential for level 1 achievement. It is intended to provide progression to the Foundation Diploma or GCSEs. The vocational strand will offer the opportunity to begin to accumulate level 1 vocational qualifications, which will, where appropriate, be recognised within the Additional and Specialist Learning component of the Foundation Diploma. It is being initially trialled from September 2008 for learners at Key Stage 4, across ten 14-19 Partnerships, including institutions involved in delivery of the Foundation Diploma. Additional trials are currently being planned for 16-19 learners.

Skilled Work Pathway (Apprenticeship)

This Pathway will support 16 to 18 year-olds who are working predominately at level 1, and will also include the potential for level 2 achievement where appropriate. It is mainly intended to provide progression to an Apprenticeship. The vocational qualifications will align with the entry requirements of an Apprenticeship in the sector a young person is considering. Learners will have the opportunity to begin to accumulate level 2 qualifications to count towards their Apprenticeship. It is currently being developed and modelled, with around 1,300 learners and a focused national support programme for the participating providers.

Independent living or supported employment Pathway

This Pathway has been designed for 16 to 25 year-old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who wish to move to independent living or supported employment. We are consulting stakeholders about the most appropriate achievement threshold for all learners, acknowledging that for some learners a full Pathway may be inappropriate. It is currently being developed and modelled with a representative group of post-16 providers.

- 6.11** A Foundation Learning Tier Prospectus will enable providers to access information about the Pathways and the qualifications within them, and guide learners to the most appropriate provision. We anticipate that provider collaboration will be key to delivering the Pathways. 14-19 Partnerships will take a lead role in co-ordinating provision from a wide range of providers. This will inform the commissioning processes of local authorities and the LSC. Voluntary and community sector involvement will be important.
- 6.12** Implementation will begin on a small scale from September 2008, and will be delivered in a phased approach to 2011. From that point the expectation is that publicly funded provision at Entry level and level 1 for 14-19 year-olds will be delivered through one of the Progression Pathways, or through the Foundation Diploma. However, in some cases, there may be a need to retain some agreed stand-alone provision at Entry level and level 1.
- 6.13** As we trial further the Foundation Learning Tier, we will need to consider how best to incentivise completion of Progression Pathways. In considering this, the principle that Foundation Learning Tier delivery must be flexible and personalised to meet the range of learner needs at this level will be maintained. We believe that, where it is the right level of learning for them, all young people should have access to an appropriate Progression Pathway within the Foundation Learning Tier.

We are developing a new 'Entry to Learning' programme to re-engage young people who have disengaged from learning

6.14 We know that that many young people who have disengaged from learning post-16 are not ready to go straight back into formal learning. There are already a number of innovative schemes offering short re-engagement activity to help restore young people's confidence and self-esteem, and prepare them for re-entering learning. However, the connections between schemes of this kind and more formal learning programmes may not be strong. That is why in the Children's Plan we committed to allocating £31.5 million over three years to bridge this gap by ensuring that re-engagement is accompanied by clear progression routes which will take young people back into formal learning, supported by mentoring and guidance, in many cases through the Foundation Learning Tier Progression Pathways. We will be working with the LSC and a range of providers to start piloting the programme this year.

Question: Do you agree that all young people learning at Entry level or level 1 should have access to an appropriate Progression Pathway within the Foundation Learning Tier?

Chapter 7: Making it happen

Summary

The new independent regulator (the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, to be known as Ofqual) will have a key role to play in relation to 14-19 qualifications, ensuring that standards are maintained and that different qualifications are easily comparable.

A clear and transparent qualifications framework is key to enabling all qualifications to be well understood. We believe that moving to a single credit-based framework for all 14-19 qualifications – presenting them in a way that is easier to understand, through comparing not only the level but also the size of different qualifications – could have significant benefits for young learners, supporting progression from one route to another and into adult learning. We plan to put forward more detailed proposals on how we will move 14-19 qualifications onto a credit-based framework, with a view to completing this move by 2013.

The Expert Group underlined that every young person should receive the high-quality information, advice and guidance that they need to help them make decisions about the learning and training choices that would best suit them. We must also make sure that every young person has the financial support they need to take up a learning place and remain in that learning. We are ensuring that the teachers and others who are key to making the changes work, have the support they need.

The independent regulator will have a key role to play in relation to 14-19 qualifications

- 7.1 We want a system where all qualifications are world-class. We have just finished consulting on the creation of a new independent regulator of qualifications and tests, in order to maintain public confidence in the rigour of our qualifications, and on changes to the role of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The regulator will have a key role to play in relation to 14-19 qualifications, ensuring that standards are maintained.
- 7.2 As set out in our consultation document, *Confidence in Standards*, it is appropriate that the regulatory framework should allow for different approaches to different qualifications. The tradition in England has been for public qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels to be highly regulated by QCA in order to ensure rigorous standards over time. That approach is now being applied to Diplomas. The approach to vocational and vocationally-related qualifications, including those which will be included within the Diploma as options for Additional and Specialist Learning, has been different. The guarantor of quality has been the extent to which employers have confidence that the qualifications are conferring up-to-date and relevant skills, with flexibility to

meet business needs. This has been reinforced in some cases by the endorsement of sector bodies.

- 7.3** As we take forward the proposals set out in this document, in line with the approach set out in *Confidence in Standards*, the regulator will take a view, based on risk, about which qualifications need closer scrutiny at the point of entry to the system. Ministers may also take a view about which qualifications should be closely scrutinised as a matter of policy. Together, these will need to secure standards and comparability of all qualifications offered to young people, whilst retaining responsiveness and flexibility in the system.

A clear qualifications framework is key to enabling all accredited qualifications to be well understood

- 7.4** Currently, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) lists all accredited qualifications and identifies each one consistently at a given level of challenge. A level 3 qualification, for example, is equivalent to an A level in terms of its level of challenge. However, the NQF does not identify the relative sizes of different qualifications or units of qualifications: some individual qualifications (such as GCSEs) normally only occupy a small proportion of a student's learning programme, whereas others (such as a Foundation Diploma) will take up a substantial proportion of a student's time. Understanding the size of a qualification – its credit value – as well as its level of challenge, is important in understanding what an individual has achieved.
- 7.5** A credit-based framework has the potential to provide a transparent, commonly understood system for assessing the size – credit value – as well as the level of a qualification. Such a framework would define all qualifications in terms of a combination of units, each with a level and credit value attached. Some qualifications may be single unit qualifications; others may have more complex rules. Such a framework enables greater flexibility in transferring achievement, as the same unit may appear in the rules of a number of qualifications. Having achieved that unit a student may therefore be able to use it to contribute towards achievement of a different qualification, if they decide to change routes. In addition, for many students, achieving credit as they progress through smaller defined chunks of learning can help build confidence and increase opportunities for achieving full qualifications.
- 7.6** Understanding the level and size of qualifications is important when building up aggregate qualifications, such as Diplomas. Some other 14-19 learning options also currently require aggregation of components and take advantage of the opportunities a credit-based system provides – such as the Foundation Learning Tier Progression Pathways or Apprenticeships. However, there is currently no single framework for assessing credit and recording achievement consistently across the different 14-19 learning routes.
- 7.7** We believe that moving to a single credit-based framework for 14-19 qualifications would have significant benefits. It would allow achievement in different qualifications suites to be transferred, supporting progression, particularly for young people who may want to change routes. It would also provide a means for achievement pre-19 to be carried forward into adult

learning, supporting lifelong learning. A 14-19 credit framework would need to be able to accommodate tight rules of combination for qualifications for 14-19 year-olds, in order to guarantee that they are following broad and coherent programmes.

- 7.8** In moving towards a 14-19 credit framework we can build on and learn from the trials and evaluation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), which QCA is currently undertaking with partner regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland as part of the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme.
- 7.9** Moving to a credit-based framework would present some challenges. We would need to ensure that existing non-credit-based qualifications – notably GCSEs and A levels – could be incorporated without undue impact on the qualifications. We would also want to model further the impact on learning providers, particularly schools, and on the market. This should inform further work to assess the full costs and benefits. And we would need to explore further with the Devolved Administrations in Wales and Northern Ireland the implications for the three-country qualifications framework we are committed to maintaining. We believe these challenges can be met, and, subject to the outcome of this consultation, we propose to work with QCA to put forward more detailed proposals by the end of 2008.

We will ensure that learners can achieve qualifications in the best way for them

- 7.10** A new requirement to participate will be introduced from 2013, subject to the passage of legislation currently before Parliament. Young learners will be able to meet the new requirement if they are in employment, self-employed or volunteering, and undertaking part-time training. We want to ensure that all of this training provides young people with a recognised achievement and allows them to progress. For a young person for whom an Apprenticeship is not an appropriate choice, the requirement to participate could be met through undertaking accredited training provided by an employer. We are currently piloting approaches to make it easier for employers to have their own in-house training accredited through the QCF.
- 7.11** Alternatively, young learners in employment could be released for the equivalent of around one day per week to train elsewhere. The qualifications available through the national suites and frameworks will be on offer to these learners, including the opportunity to complete a Diploma begun pre-16. To meet learner needs and to provide a platform for progression, we also expect that Diploma component qualifications and those from within Apprenticeship frameworks will be available as publicly funded courses for this group. We made a commitment that we want all young people to achieve level 2 functional mathematics and English skills, and we will make these a requirement in all publicly funded learning programmes.
- 7.12** For learners who have not completed a Diploma programme before their 19th birthday, we will ensure that the funding will continue, as it does now, for the full duration of their learning programme. In addition, we are currently legislating to make the offer of a learning programme that leads to a full level 2 or level 3 qualification a statutory entitlement for all 19-25 year-olds.

High quality information, advice and guidance will enable young people to make the most of what is on offer

7.13 As we expand the opportunities available, we need to be confident that young people are supported to make informed choices about what they want to do, and to exercise these choices. Young people and parents need high quality information, advice and guidance (IAG) to make informed decisions about the opportunities on offer. We know that, whilst there is much good practice in IAG provision, there is scope for improving the range of services currently available. We are addressing this through a package of measures. These will be co-ordinated by local authorities which, from April this year, will be responsible for commissioning and managing IAG services in their areas, enabling the Connexions service to make improved links with other services for young people.

A properly trained and supported workforce is key to the success of our reforms

7.14 The right qualification offer is central to our reforms, but we have been clear that only a focus on delivery in practice and on standards of provision will bring about the change in achievement and participation that is needed. A properly trained and supported school and college workforce is key to success. We are offering training and support to the workforce, so that they can successfully teach the new qualifications. We are also ensuring that 14-19 partnerships and Diploma consortia are supported to drive forward the changes to the way education is provided across their area.

Question: Do you agree that we should explore the introduction of a credit-based framework for 14-19 qualifications, with a view to implementing it by 2013?

Responding to this consultation

We will listen carefully to the views and comments made in response to this consultation.

The closing date for this consultation is 23 June 2008.

You can respond online at www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations or in writing to:

Consultation Unit (A Strategy for 14-19 Qualifications)

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Area 1A, Castle View House

East Lane

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WA7 2GJ

After the consultation period has ended we will analyse responses to these questions.

We will then publish this analysis and confirm our plans.

Annex A:

The approval of qualifications under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 – criteria for consultation

The criteria for the approval of qualifications under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 cover students in maintained schools, and under 19 year-olds in further and work-based education and training. It is proposed that the following criteria should apply to all qualifications in England. The Secretary of State retains discretion to make decisions on a case by case basis.

Criteria for the public funding of qualifications in England

The key purpose of qualifications is to show clearly and publicly the knowledge, skills and attributes that an individual has gained, especially to inform prospective employers and future providers of education and training. The value of qualifications is therefore in very large part defined by how well they are understood by those to whom they may be presented as evidence. Someone who has acquired the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary for a particular programme of learning or for employment, but whose qualifications are not understood is at a significant disadvantage in demonstrating that they are in fact qualified.

The more widely understood a qualification is, the more transferable it is. Other things being equal, a qualification understood in all sectors of the economy is more valuable to its holder than one understood by only a few. This remains the case for occupationally-specific qualifications: if a demanding training for a particular occupation is recognised through a widely understood qualification, the skills of the individual holding that qualification (including the capacity to complete the training in question) will be more likely to be recognised in another occupational area. This is a particularly important consideration in relation to the qualifications which are available to young people. For young people, choices about their future may not be settled and the flexibility to choose to change direction later is crucial. The qualifications that young people take need, therefore, to be widely understood and transferable to different contexts.

In order to secure these objectives, it is the Government's policy that as far as possible, qualifications for young people eligible for use in maintained educational institutions should fall within a set of national qualification suites and frameworks: A levels and GCSEs; Diplomas; Apprenticeships; and the Progression Pathways for 14-19 year-olds within the Foundation Learning Tier.

A levels and GCSEs are the most widely understood qualifications available to young people. Diplomas, Apprenticeships and the Foundation Learning Tier Progression Pathways are broad

frameworks which can contain within them a range of other qualifications, and in which young people can learn the functional skills (in English, mathematics and ICT) and the personal, learning and thinking skills. In the case of Diplomas, there is a range of qualification choices within the Additional and Specialist Learning component – which offers considerable opportunity to bring in much of the best of existing content.

Diplomas are new qualifications and the range of Additional and Specialist Learning is not yet complete. It will not be until the full range of Additional and Specialist Learning is complete and the qualifications have been tested in practice by a wide range of learners in different circumstances, that it will be possible to move over fully to the long-term goal of funding only those qualifications falling within the national suites. In addition, practical experience may show that there are some existing qualifications which serve the needs of particular learners or are important to particular employers, and that these particular needs cannot be met within the national suites. This is likely to apply to specific qualifications, for example in particular sectoral areas, rather than to suites of qualifications. Where this proves to be the case, it will not be the policy of the Government to withdraw funding from these qualifications, since the overriding priority will be to secure the interests of learners.

In this context, the criteria for public funding are set out below. They should be read in the context of the policy described above.

A. Prior accreditation by a regulatory body

Only qualifications that meet high-quality standards shall be eligible for public funding. Accreditation by Ofqual (or a regulatory body recognised by them) will be expected to provide these assurances.

B. Suitability for the age group

Account will be taken of whether the qualification is suitable for the age-group in terms of maturity, social well-being and health and safety requirements.

C. Fit with the National Curriculum

Where it is proposed to offer qualifications at Key Stage 4 in a National Curriculum subject, to be eligible for funding, qualifications must meet the requirements of any relevant programmes of study.

D. Criteria for qualifications forming part of one of the national suites or frameworks

Qualifications that form part of one of the following national suites or frameworks will generally be approved for funding:

- GCSEs and A levels
- Diplomas
- Apprenticeship frameworks
- Foundation Learning Tier Progression Pathways for 14-19 learners

However, these qualifications will generally be approved to be offered only within the programme or programmes of which they form part, unless they also meet the criteria for free-standing qualifications.

E. Criteria for new free-standing qualifications

There is a presumption against beginning for the first time to approve (as free-standing qualifications outside the national suites) qualifications which have not previously been approved for use. Only where the introduction of the new qualification would meet the specific needs of a group of learners, employers or higher education institutions whose needs cannot be met by the national qualification suites and frameworks, would the Secretary of State approve the new qualification as a free-standing qualification.

This presumption applies to new qualifications within existing suites, but not to re-developed versions of pre-existing qualifications coming forward for re-approval.

F. Criteria for re-approved free-standing qualifications

To continue to be approved as a free-standing qualification, an awarding body must demonstrate that a qualification has significant uptake for the under 19 age-group (typically, this will mean at least 100 certifications per year). Or if not, that there is a clear case that the qualification meets a specific need (of a group of learners, employers or higher education institutions) and which cannot be met in other ways.

Where a qualification has significant uptake, the following judgements will be made:

- a. whether there are qualifications within the national suite which can meet the needs of young people, employers, universities and wider society as well as or better than this qualification. If this is not yet the case, then, where the qualification represents good value for money, it would continue to receive public funding.
- b. if (a) is the case, whether the effectiveness of the qualifications within the national suite in meeting these needs has been demonstrated in practice in a sufficiently wide range of circumstances for this judgement to be made with confidence. If this is not yet the case, then the qualification would continue to receive public funding.
- c. if (a) and (b) are the case, whether the qualifications within the national suite are nationally available. If there are parts of the country which have access to the qualification under consideration, but not yet the relevant parts of the national suite, then the qualification would continue to receive public funding.

If conditions (a) – (c) are in place, the qualification would not continue to be eligible for public funding. In determining whether conditions (a) – (c) are met, the Secretary of State will take advice from the Joint Advisory Committee on Qualifications Approval, representing the views of employers, HE, and the education and training system. This Committee will undertake a biennial review of the 14-19 qualifications available to young people to inform their decisions.

If condition (c) is not met, but it is clear that it will shortly be met, or if it appears to the Secretary of State that all the conditions may shortly be met, a decision may be made to continue approval only for a defined period, shorter than the period of accreditation.

Where a decision is made to withdraw approval from a qualification which has previously been approved, it may be appropriate to continue approval for a short period, in order to enable institutions which have been offering it to make a smooth transition to alternative qualifications.

G. Review

These criteria for public funding will be kept under review. In particular, the Government has committed to a first full review of general qualifications, including GCSEs and A levels, in 2013.



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