

**1999**

## **Qualifications 16–19**

**A guide to the changes resulting from the  
Qualifying for Success consultation**



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# Foreword

The government recently announced the introduction of a new reformulated GCE Advanced Subsidiary qualification, improvements to GCE A levels, advanced GNVQs (including a new six-unit qualification) and intermediate and foundation GNVQs, and a new Key Skills qualification, all to be implemented from September 2000.

This booklet provides details about these changes to help curriculum managers in schools and colleges plan their provision from 2000. It will also be useful for governing bodies, local education authorities, careers services, training and enterprise councils and other training providers that support 16–19-year-old students and their teachers.

The developments provide opportunities for schools and colleges to broaden educational programmes, maintain study in depth and improve progression opportunities for their students. We hope this booklet will provide a helpful resource to support the detailed thinking and planning needed to put these important reforms to best use.



Dr Nicholas Tate  
Chief Executive  
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

# Introduction

Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority  
(QCA) England

Awdurdod Cymwysterau  
Cwricwlwm ac Asesu  
(ACCAC) Wales

Council for Curriculum,  
Examinations and  
Assessment  
(CCEA) Northern Ireland

The government has decided to introduce a number of reforms to post-16 qualifications in the light of advice from QCA, ACCAC and CCEA, the regulatory authorities for qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The underlying purpose of the reforms – which follow the consultation on *Qualifying for Success* – is to address undue narrowness and lack of flexibility in the post-16 curriculum. The developments are designed to lead to broader A level programmes and improved vocational qualifications that are underpinned by rigorous standards and key skills.

Students following A level programmes will be able to broaden their programmes by studying additional subjects using the new Advanced Subsidiary qualification or, if they wish, adding a vocational dimension and studying one or more of the new smaller six-unit GNVQ qualifications. Students on vocational programmes will be able to broaden their studies by using one or more of the smaller GNVQ qualifications and the new Advanced Subsidiary. Measures to ensure that units are the same size, and the use of a common grading system for advanced level qualifications, will lead to greater choice and flexibility in selecting qualifications to meet individual needs. All students will now have the opportunity to broaden their studies through the development of key skills leading to national certification.

These reforms need to be set against a wider agenda. The commitment to the needs of lifelong learners, the construction of a national qualifications framework, the exploration of models for overarching certificates, modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and changes to the higher education admissions process are important developments. These all provide a context for improvements to individual qualifications.

The reforms provide schools and colleges with an opportunity to review their approach to post-16 education and training. They are an important step on the way to achieving a system that will serve our 16–19-year-olds well into the next century while enhancing opportunities for a wider group of learners.

# Qualifications reforms

## GCE A level

### **Structure**

GCE Advanced levels (A levels) are designed mainly for post-16 students who are following a two-year full-time course of study. For courses starting in September 2000, A levels will generally be based on six units of approximately equal size. Three of these will make up an Advanced Subsidiary (AS) course, representing the first half of an advanced level course of study. The other three will be known as A2, representing the second half. A level and AS courses may be assessed either in stages or at the end of the course.

This model offers considerable flexibility for teachers to develop a range of approaches to teaching and learning. Those who prefer to link teaching programmes with the facility for students to take their examinations in stages will be able to do so. It will also be possible, if teachers prefer, to assess at the end of the programme.

In a few small-entry subjects, where the regulatory authorities accept that it is uneconomical for awarding bodies to offer both staged and end-of-course assessment, only the latter option will be available. In most of these cases, the option of taking the AS halfway through the course will be available.

### **Assessment**

A key feature of A level has been its emphasis on demanding and rigorous assessment, including a substantial external element. This will be maintained. For some subjects with criteria, there has been some modest increase in the proportion of internal assessment (coursework).

All A levels will include an element of synoptic assessment designed to test candidates' ability to make connections between different aspects of the subject. The synoptic element must normally contribute 20 per cent to the full A level and take the form of external assessment at the end of the course. The nature of the synoptic assessment will vary according to the nature of particular subjects.

In line with the intention that A levels should be predominantly two-year full-time courses, only one resit of each assessment unit will be allowed. It will be possible to retake the whole examination more than once. The shelf-life of assessment units will be limited by the life of the specification (syllabus).

Six unit A level

Staged and end-of-course  
assessment.

External and internal  
assessment.

Synoptic assessment

Resits and retakes

### ***Grading***

The A level will be graded A to E for pass grades, with U (unclassified) for fail. The current N (near miss) will be dropped. The N was originally introduced to give students who had just missed a pass some formative feedback. There is evidence that this function has not been well understood by candidates. It is now unnecessary, because units will be separately certificated.

## **GCE Advanced Subsidiary**

### ***Structure***

The reformulated GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) was a key recommendation arising from Lord Dearing's review of qualifications for 16–19-year-olds. The Advanced Subsidiary will consist of three units of approximately equal size that are the first half of the A level course. The new qualification is designed to support progression and encourage breadth in post-16 programmes. Those students who, having started an A level programme, decide not to continue beyond the first year with one or more subjects, will have their attainments to that point recognised. Students will also be able to use the new Advanced Subsidiary to broaden or enhance their A level studies.

### ***Assessment***

The coursework and external assessment requirements for the Advanced Subsidiary are part of the requirements for the full A level.

There will be no synoptic requirement in the Advanced Subsidiary, but in all other respects – resits, certification and shelf-life – the Advanced Subsidiary requirements will be the same as those for A level.

The material examined in the Advanced Subsidiary will be selected from material examined at A level. Sample questions will be provided to help teachers understand the requirements of the qualification.

### ***Grading***

The new Advanced Subsidiary will be graded on an A to E scale, with U (unclassified) for fail. Achievement on the Advanced Subsidiary will, with the A2, contribute equally to the full A level.

## **Provision for the most able**

The government has announced the introduction of new 'world class tests', aimed at the most able students. These will be designed to be more accessible than the current Special papers. Further information will be provided in the summer.

## GNVQ

### **Structure**

A new style of unit has been piloted, and will be introduced in all GNVQ subjects at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels from September 2000. The new units set out the knowledge, understanding and skills required in clear, jargon-free language. At all levels, the qualification will consist of a combination of compulsory and optional units. At foundation and intermediate levels, three out of six units will be compulsory; at advanced level, from six to eight of the units studied will be compulsory, appropriate to the vocational area.

At advanced level, a new six-unit GNVQ will be introduced. Three or four of the units will be compulsory, appropriate to the vocational area. The six-unit GNVQ has been designed to meet progression needs in different vocational areas, and offer choice and flexibility to schools and colleges. Evidence from piloting indicates that this new qualification is being used to add to the breadth of students' programmes.

At advanced level, the new three-unit GNVQ may be introduced from September 2000. If introduced it will be available in a very limited range of titles in specific vocational areas where the demand from employers, schools and colleges is clear and where the award represents a coherent qualification. Schools and colleges will receive further information about the titles from the awarding bodies early in 2000.

### **Assessment**

The new assessment arrangements for the GNVQ are designed to increase rigour and manageability. Normally, one-third of the assessment will be external. External assessment may take a number of forms, such as set assignments or tests administered by awarding bodies, depending upon the unit being assessed. The two-thirds of the assessment that is internal will be moderated by the awarding body. Assessment and grading will be based on performance in the unit using assessment criteria based on the unit's requirements. Evidence from the pilot indicates that the new model – streamlined in the light of experience – is considerably more reliable, accurate and manageable.

### **Grading**

Each unit will be graded. Unit grades will be converted into points, which will be aggregated to produce a grade for the whole qualification. At intermediate and foundation level, pass, merit and distinction grades will be used. At advanced level, A to E grading will be used in line with the A level system. This will give selectors in higher education and employment more information and make it easier for them to compare candidates' performances across different qualifications.

### **Part One GNVQ**

Part One GNVQ will consist of three compulsory units at intermediate and foundation levels. It will be nationally available from September 1999 in seven areas, with new units available from September 2000. It will also be available post-16. For more information, contact the 14–19 Curriculum Section at QCA.

Clear, jargon-free language

Six-unit advanced GNVQ

Three-unit advanced GNVQ

Rigour and manageability

Unit grading.

A to E at advanced

Part One GNVQ.

## Key skills

The development and application of key skills are essential features of government plans for the education and training of 16–19-year-olds.

Key Skills qualification

A new qualification based on the key skills of communication, application of number and information technology will be available from September 2000. Attainment will be assessed and recorded separately on a single certificate for students who achieve a level in all three skills.

Key skills, GNVQ and A level.

GNVQ qualifications will be awarded on the basis of attainment in the vocational units, with attainment in the key skills being separately reported and certificated as indicated above. Key skills will nevertheless remain an integral part of teaching and learning in all GNVQ programmes. At AS and A level, where a key skill is integral to attainment in the subject, specific assessment requirements will be included and contribute directly to the grades awarded.

The key skills will be clearly signposted in the GNVQ vocational units, highlighting opportunities for learning and assessment. A similar approach will be used in A levels. A level study will encourage students to generate portfolio evidence that can be used in the new Key Skills qualification or contribute to achievement of individual key skills units.

This approach is designed to encourage all students studying A level to exploit opportunities to develop key skills in the context of their studies. Where their studies do not generate all the evidence needed for key skill certification, evidence from other sources will be required.

The wider key skills of improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem solving should continue to be part of post-16 education and training programmes. GNVQ and A level courses will provide opportunities for the development of these skills. These opportunities will also be signposted in A level and GNVQ specifications.

## Phasing out current qualifications

Existing A level and Advanced Supplementary qualifications are being withdrawn to timetables set by the awarding bodies. The awarding bodies have confirmed that a full range of Advanced Supplementary examinations will be available in 2001 for those candidates planning to follow two-year courses beginning in September 1999. For candidates who have not completed modular courses by the summer of 2001, arrangements may be made for them to complete their qualifications within a specified period of time.

A decision has not yet been made concerning how long the current GNVQ specifications will remain available. It is likely to be at least until 2001 for students beginning programmes in September 1999. Existing students will not be able to transfer to the new specifications because of the nature of the changes to the qualification (unit specifications, assessment and grading arrangements). Details of all these changes will be available from the awarding bodies.

# The wider context

This section provides information on the wider developments that will affect the curriculum and qualifications studied by 16–19-year-olds.

## ***Lifelong learning and the national qualifications framework***

A broader vision of a national framework of qualifications for young people from age 14, and for adults, was outlined in the Green Papers on lifelong learning (The Learning Age in England and Northern Ireland and Learning is for Everyone in Wales).

QCA, ACCAC and CCEA are responsible for developing a coherent national framework of academic and vocational qualifications. The framework will be designed to:

- promote lifelong learning through clear routes of progression supporting the achievement of national targets;
- promote access, motivation and attainment in education and training;
- avoid unnecessary duplication and overlap between qualifications, while ensuring sufficient breadth of provision to meet the full range of needs;
- promote confidence in the relevance and integrity of national awards.

In addition, Ministers have asked the regulatory authorities to explore the implications and the feasibility of moving towards a unitised or credit-based system as a way of increasing opportunities for adults and other part-time learners, to study. A consultation has been undertaken by QCA and similar exercises are underway in Wales and Northern Ireland. Advice will be given to Ministers in late spring/early summer 1999.

In spring 1999, the regulatory authorities are due to publish the criteria that will form the basis of accreditation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These will ensure that the quality, consistency and standards of national qualifications can be guaranteed across awarding bodies and over time. To be admitted to the national qualifications framework, qualifications must make an appropriate and distinctive contribution to the framework and meet the needs of users. It is intended that the national framework will be in place by September 2001.

## ***Entry level***

The introduction of Entry level – the initial level in the new national framework of qualifications – was a key recommendation arising from Lord Dearing's review. Entry level awards are for learners who are not yet ready for GCSE, foundation GNVQ or NVQ level 1. They are nationally recognised qualifications, accredited by QCA and its partner bodies in Wales and Northern Ireland. There are three levels of achievement, which are broadly in line with national curriculum levels 1–3.

Ensuring the quality, consistency and standards of national qualifications

An appropriate and distinctive contribution

### ***Overarching certificates***

The regulatory authorities are developing proposals for a range of approaches to overarching certification. Advice will be given to Ministers in spring 1999. The model that currently has the greatest support combines a study in depth involving the equivalent of at least two A levels, key skills and broadening studies, and a synoptic element, possibly in the form of a project. There are a number of issues yet to resolve and an overarching certificate is not expected to be available for courses starting before 2002 at the earliest.

### ***Modern apprenticeships***

Modern apprenticeships are aimed primarily at those in the 16–19 age group who have the ability to gain high-level skills and qualifications. Funding is available up to an apprentice's 25th birthday. Modern apprenticeships have been available since 1996 and take-up has grown steadily.

Modern apprenticeship training frameworks are developed on a sector basis with national training organisations (NTOs) working in partnership with employers and training and enterprise councils (TECs). The frameworks identify the skills, knowledge and understanding that modern apprentices need to develop.

Modern apprenticeships provide a structured programme of training, based on the achievement of NVQ at level 3, indicating that the young person can do a job to the standard that industry currently requires. The training also looks to the future, recognising that tomorrow's supervisors and managers will need more than technical skills. The training includes the key skills important within the particular sector, and other broader skills needed to meet the particular demands of employers.

Indications are that modern apprenticeships are proving very popular with young people. The first apprentices are now finishing their training and progressing in employment; some of them are entering higher education. Colleges, and in a very small number of cases schools, are involved in the support of modern apprenticeships, particularly in developing the key skills and supporting some aspects of off-the-job training.

### ***National traineeships***

National traineeships were introduced in September 1997 and are targeted at 16–19-year-olds.

National traineeships provide a structured programme of training based on the achievement of NVQ level 2, focusing on skills used in process and technical occupations, without the broader preparation for supervisory or junior management roles offered by the modern apprenticeship. Trainees are required to gain the appropriate level of competence in key skills.

National traineeships will provide progression to a range of further opportunities. It is hoped that many trainees will move on to further education and training, including modern apprenticeships, thus opening up further opportunities for lifelong learning.

As with modern apprenticeships, colleges, and in a very small number of cases schools, are involved in supporting national traineeships.

### ***Application and admission to higher education***

QCA, ACCAC, CCEA and UCAS will continue to work closely with higher education institutions and schools and colleges to make sure that applicants to higher education can progress smoothly. Students will have more flexibility when deciding their appropriate programmes of study before entry. Academic and admissions staff need to be aware of the range of options when determining the nature of the offer.

During 1998, QCA and UCAS organised conferences for higher education to introduce academic staff and admissions officers to the planned changes. Since then, the regulatory bodies and UCAS have published and distributed a booklet for higher education entitled *The new national framework for qualifications; briefing for higher education*.

UCAS is developing new systems for reporting different types and combinations of qualifications. There is a proposal for a new points system, which will cover a wider range of qualifications, including key skills. The developing electronic application system may include an electronic curriculum vitae, which will present attainment graphically.

The course search facility on the UCAS web site will, in future, include admission criteria profiles which present information on the entry requirements for individual higher education programmes in terms of whole and part qualifications, combinations of qualification families, and key skills. UCAS is working with higher education staff involved in teaching programmes to explore how much depth is necessary, in what form, and how to encourage breadth.

# Future developments

May 1999

AS/A proposals submitted by the awarding bodies to the regulatory authorities.  
Accreditation of qualifications to the national framework begins.

June 1999

Regional seminars planned to update schools and colleges on the reforms.

Summer 1999

Guidance on curriculum models for schools and colleges published.

September 1999

Part One GNVQ becomes nationally available using current units.  
Brief synopses of AS/A specifications published.

September 1999

Revised foundation and intermediate GNVQ units available for teaching in September 2000.

December 1999

Awarding bodies publish accredited AS/A specifications together with sample assessment materials and marking schemes.

January 2000

Revised advanced GNVQ units available for teaching in September 2000.

Spring 2000

Guidance materials on the grading and assessment requirements of the new GNVQ and A/AS published.

September 2000

New A/AS, GNVQ and Key Skills qualifications available for first teaching.

January 2001

First AS and GNVQ units assessed.

Summer 2001

First AS, intermediate, foundation and six-unit advanced GNVQ awarded.

Summer 2002

First A level, advanced GNVQ and Part One GNVQ awarded.

## About this publication

Who's it for? This guidance is aimed at curriculum managers in schools and colleges. It will also be useful for governing bodies, local education authorities, careers services, training and enterprise councils and other agencies that support 16–19-year-old students and their teachers.

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What's it about? The government recently announced the introduction of a new, reformulated GCE Advanced Subsidiary qualification, improvements to GCE A levels, advanced GNVQs (including six-unit qualifications) and intermediate and foundation GNVQs, and a new Key Skills qualification, all to be implemented from September 2000. This booklet provides details about these changes to help curriculum managers in schools and colleges plan their 16–19 provision from 2000.

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What next? Later in 1999, QCA will offer curriculum models, based on the new and reformulated qualifications, to further assist schools and colleges in planning for September 2000.

***This publication has been sent to:***

All secondary schools, FE colleges, HE institutions, LEAs, TECs and career services.

***For more information contact:***

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