

Qualifications for 14-16 Year Olds and Performance Tables

Technical guidance for
Awarding Organisations

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Summary

In line with Professor Wolf's recommendations, in future, only qualifications which are high quality, rigorous and enable progression to a range of study and employment opportunities will be recognised in school performance tables for 14-16 year olds. From 2014 the headline performance tables measures will no longer include equivalences, nor will they include qualifications that are smaller than GCSEs in size. The list of qualifications that will count in the headline measures will be available in early 2012. Until the list is produced, we recommend that whilst taking on board these changes, schools exercise caution in making changes to their timetables.

The responses to the consultation have informed the development of the characteristics and helped refine the process for including qualifications in performance tables. This includes allowing a longer time for Awarding Organisations to refine their existing qualifications and a two year period where no new qualifications will be considered for inclusion in the performance tables. Further headlines from the consultation are at Annex B.

Qualifications will need to meet all the characteristics in order to be included in the tables. For qualifications which are too new to prove progression or take-up there will be opportunities for the Awarding Organisation to gather evidence for review. For qualifications which fail the assessment and/or grading characteristics only, there will be a short period of up to 12 months for the Awarding Organisation to redevelop the qualification.

Introduction

High quality vocational education is essential for the future economic growth of our country, and to provide the opportunities that will allow all our young people to thrive and succeed. Vocational qualifications for 14-16 year olds must be just as stretching and challenging as academic or general qualifications, and enable them to progress to a broad range of future study and careers. The existing system has not helped schools and young people to identify the vocational qualifications which do this; and the equivalences system has given the impression that some vocational qualifications may be as valuable to a young person's future career as two, three or four GCSEs, only for those young people to find that, beyond the school gates, colleges and employers place far less value on them.

We have accepted Professor Wolf's recommendation that in future, only qualifications which are high quality, rigorous and enable progression to a

range of study and employment opportunities will be recognised in the headline measures in the Key Stage 4 performance tables.

This document is intended to provide Awarding Organisations with the technical detail they need in order to submit qualifications for inclusion in the headline measures.

The list of qualifications that will count in headline measures will be available in early 2012. Until the list is finalised, we recommend that whilst taking on board the changes outlined below, schools exercise caution in making changes to their timetables. We expect the great majority of students to study predominantly academic courses to age 16, supplemented where relevant by appropriate vocational courses. That said, in all cases schools should act in the way they judge to be in the best interests of their students, regardless of whether a particular qualification or course will be recognised for the purposes of performance tables.

In order to help schools with their planning, two particularly important changes to be taken into account are:

- the reforming of equivalences – one qualification will count for one in the performance tables from 2014. This will affect decisions about which qualifications are taught from September 2012; and
- qualifications smaller in size than a GCSE (120 guided learning hours) will no longer count in headline performance tables measures from 2014. For clarity this means that short course GCSEs will not count in headline performance tables from 2014.

The other characteristics that qualifications will need to demonstrate, if they are to be recognised in performance tables, will be:

- grading;
- external assessment;
- synoptic assessment;
- progression;
- proven track record;
- appropriate content.

These characteristics are discussed in greater detail below. We believe that qualifications that display these characteristics will be most likely to promote successful progression to pupils' next stage of education, training or employment. Through these reforms, therefore, we will help to establish vocational education for young people in this country that has, and deserves to have, as high a status as more traditional, academic routes.

The list of qualifications is being introduced for headline performance tables measures. This includes a replacement for the existing 5+ A*-C GCSE or equivalent measure. As part of the transparency agenda, performance in all

qualifications, whether they are included in the list or not, will also be made available.

Regardless of whether a qualification is included in headline performance tables measures, in future our general rule will be that all qualifications regulated by Ofqual will be approved on Section 96 to be funded for teaching, subject to minimal checks that they are not inappropriate for 14-16 year olds. There may be students for whom qualifications not included in the list for headline measures are the most appropriate ones for them. Where it is in a student's best interest, schools are encouraged to teach qualifications not included on the list.

Section 1: Characteristics and evidence requirements of qualifications that will feature in future headline performance tables

- 1.1 Full course GCSEs, established iGCSEs¹ and AS levels will continue to count in performance tables. All other qualifications, accredited by Ofqual, will need to meet the following characteristics to be included in headline measures in the Key Stage 4 performance tables in future. Each characteristic is described in detail below including the justification for its use and the requirements that will need to be met when Awarding Organisations put forward qualifications for inclusion in the tables. Where there is a strong case, minor refinements to some of these characteristics may still be considered.

A. Appropriate size

Detail

- 1.2 Qualifications will need to be at least 120 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) in order to count in the headline Key Stage 4 performance tables.

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.3 The qualifications that young people study must be well understood and have 'currency' with schools, further education institutions and employers. In order to have currency, the qualification needs to be of sufficient size to ensure meaningful learning takes place. This supports the synoptic assessment characteristic to ensure students have a coherent programme of study.
- 1.4 Having reviewed the measures available to assess relative size of qualifications, we have decided to use one of the most commonly used measures i.e. Guided Learning Hours (GLH). The GLH value gives an indication of the time a member of staff will typically need to be present to teach or give guidance towards gaining a qualification. The GLH value for a full GCSE is 120 GLH and we will adopt this as the minimum value for all qualifications to be included in the headline performance measures.
- 1.5 However, we have some concerns, which are shared with Ofqual, that the GLH values currently collected for qualifications do not present a true picture in all cases. Where it is available, we will therefore look to Awarding Organisations to provide evidence of actual teaching time, to

¹ Established iGCSE is defined as "Accredited versions of qualifications which were being offered as 'iGCSE' and were being taken in independent and/or international schools before June 2010 when Ministers announced that they would allow the use of accredited iGCSE qualifications in maintained schools"

validate the established GLH value.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.6 The GLH value is identified when a qualification is submitted for accreditation to Ofqual. Awarding Organisations enter this value onto the Register of Regulated Qualifications (held by Ofqual) which can be viewed by DfE, schools, colleges and employers as required.
- 1.7 Awarding Organisations (AOs) will also need to provide detail on how they determined the number of Guided Learning Hours for the qualification and, as far as possible, evidence from the actual delivery of the qualification that this has proved to be accurate. This should be based on an average across a range of students of the actual time taken to deliver the qualification in schools. We will work with Ofqual to check the GLH values allocated to relevant existing qualifications and Ofqual will expect AOs to change them where they are judged to be unrealistic. In the longer term, Ofqual expects to put in place regulatory requirements to ensure that the information supplied by AOs on GLH is robust.

B. Grading

Detail

- 1.8 To be included in the headline performance tables measures, qualifications must be graded i.e. qualifications will have a pass, merit, distinction structure or a more detailed scale.

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.9 Many vocational qualifications traditionally use grading. It is important for student motivation and to provide challenge, distinguishing between levels of student achievement and ensuring there is sufficient rigour in the qualification assessment. There was support for including grading in responses to the consultation.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.10 The grading scheme is identified when a qualification is submitted for accreditation to Ofqual. Where a qualification is graded, Awarding Organisations enter this information onto the Register of Regulated Qualifications (held by Ofqual) which can be viewed by DfE, schools, colleges and employers as required. The grading/mark scheme is available in the qualification specification.

C. External assessment

Detail

- 1.11 Safeguarding standards of examinations is the responsibility of Ofqual, the Independent Regulator. Ofqual's definition of external assessment is:

“A form of independent assessment in which question papers, assignments and tasks are set by the Awarding Organisation, taken under specified conditions (including details of supervision and duration) and marked by the Awarding Organisation.”

- 1.12 This is the definition for external assessment against which all qualifications to be considered for the list will be assessed. In line with support for this level in the consultation, we have decided that external assessment should be required to contribute a minimum of 20% towards the candidate's final grade.
- 1.13 Prior to publication of the list in early 2012, we will also consider on a case by case basis qualifications that have a large amount of content subject to external assessment but because of the large size of the qualifications do not meet the 20% requirement. In these cases, we would expect that the amount of content subject to external assessment would be no less than that of a GCSE under any circumstances.

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.14 Professor Wolf's report is very clear that assessment methods for many vocational qualifications need to be strengthened if they are to be the most appropriate for 14-16 year olds. Evidence of rigorous assessment arrangements, including a substantial amount of external assessment, should be a requirement for qualifications that are counted in performance tables and used in school accountability measures. This helps to ensure that vocational qualifications offer a comparable level of challenge to academic qualifications and are seen to do so. External assessment also provides an additional check that standards are consistent across centres.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.15 For this process, Awarding Organisations will need to provide this information to the Department.

D. Synoptic assessment

Detail

- 1.16 In consultation with Awarding Organisations, the following definition for synoptic assessment has been agreed:

“A form of assessment which requires a candidate to demonstrate that s/he can identify and use effectively in an integrated way an appropriate selection of techniques, concepts, theories, and knowledge from across the whole vocational area, which are relevant to a key task.”

- 1.17 We do not intend to set a minimum contribution to the final grade that synoptic assessment must provide. It will need to be of sufficient size to meaningfully cover the full range of the qualification's content. In addition, synoptic assessment does not necessarily need to be externally assessed as we recognise that in a vocational award this will be impracticable in many cases.

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.18 Synoptic assessment is vital to increase the level of challenge for students as it requires a broader comprehension. This will help ensure that vocational qualifications are as challenging as academic ones. Taken with the minimum size requirement, adding synoptic assessment will ensure cohesiveness across a qualification and prevent qualifications from being treated as a series of disconnected components.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.19 When new or revised qualifications are added to the Register of Regulated Qualifications, Ofqual will advise DfE about the approach taken to synoptic assessment, based on information provided by Awarding Organisations. For the purpose of this exercise, we are asking Awarding Organisations to come forward with evidence where they believe their qualifications currently include synoptic assessment.

E. Progression

Detail

- 1.20 Awarding Organisations are to provide evidence that young people who complete the qualification are able to go on to study at a higher level in the same field of study and more broadly.

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.21 Professor Wolf's report recommended that young people should not specialise too early in one area. 14-16 year olds should be taking qualifications that provide the foundation for them to progress to a broad range of qualifications post-16. This had strong agreement from the consultation respondents.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.22 The DfE will be looking for evidence from Awarding Organisations that the qualification is a passport to study of that subject at the next level (in the same way, for example, that GCSE French is an accepted entry requirement to study French at A level) and more broadly. This evidence should provide both quantitative and qualitative assurance of progression. An example of quantitative evidence would be the proportion of young people who take the qualification and move on to achieve at the next level, such as Level 3 vocational qualifications, A levels or Apprenticeships. Qualitative evidence could be in the form of statements of entry requirements from 6th forms, colleges or Apprenticeship programmes.
- 1.23 For qualifications that are first awarded in 2011 or later and demonstrate all other characteristics other than track record and progression, Awarding Organisations will be allowed to put forward their qualifications and prove track record and progression at a later date.

F. Proven track record

Detail

- 1.24 In order to determine track record, qualifications will need to have been taken by at least 100 young people and in at least five centres in one of the previous three years (2009, 2010 and 2011).

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.25 A low take-up demonstrates that, for an established qualification aimed at young people, young people and schools do not in general see it as a strong route to progression post-16, particularly in the light of the recent growth in the numbers taking qualifications; and that there is a risk that it may not have sufficient currency. However, we have been careful not to set the threshold too high as we recognise there are some circumstances in which a lower take-up may reflect, for example, the specialist nature of a particular qualification.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.26 The DfE will use its records of take-up and achievement data. Awarding Organisations will also be invited to provide evidence on the take-up of their qualifications in their submissions.
- 1.27 For qualifications that are first awarded in 2011 or later and demonstrate all other characteristics other than track record and progression, Awarding Organisations will be allowed to put forward their qualifications and prove track record and progression at a later date.

G. Appropriate content

Detail

- 1.28 Qualifications should be able to demonstrate that they will support young people to:
- develop an understanding of a particular curriculum area or vocational sector;
 - acquire a significant transferable knowledge core that will support progression within that area of study and more broadly; and
 - study a subject matter that is appropriate for a qualification for this age group.

Justification for this characteristic

- 1.29 There has been significant growth in the number of new vocational qualifications developed and offered by Awarding Organisations. A lot of these qualifications were originally developed for the adult market and are quite sector specific. These are not the type of qualifications that will, in general, provide young people with the broad knowledge and understanding needed to prepare them for further study. This is a vital additional check that the content of the qualifications is designed to ensure young people are obtaining a qualification that is suitable for their age.

How judgement will be reached

- 1.30 AOs are expected to provide succinct evidence that their qualifications will achieve this for their students.

Section 2: The process for approving accredited qualifications for inclusion in headline performance tables

- 2.1 GCSEs, established iGCSEs² and AS levels will continue to count in performance tables. Graded music examinations will be considered further. Other qualifications will need to demonstrate the characteristics described in Section 1 in order to be included. The process for approving these qualifications for inclusion in Key Stage 4 performance tables headline measures is set out below, with further detail included at Annex A. This process is a one-off exercise to assess the stock of currently available qualifications.

Initial approval process – for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables

Timeline for approving qualifications for inclusion in 2014 performance tables

- 2.2 Awarding Organisations will need to submit to DfE their evidence that a qualification demonstrates the required characteristics by 30 November 2011.
- 2.3 DfE aims to publish a list of the qualifications that count in the 2014 performance tables headline measures by the end of January 2012.

Awarding Organisation submissions

- 2.4 Awarding Organisations will need to provide evidence for each qualification that is to be considered for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables that the qualification:
- meets the minimum requirements for inclusion; and
 - demonstrates additional characteristics.

A: Minimum requirements for inclusion:

A1: Accreditation – a qualification will only count in the 2014 performance tables if it:

- was accredited by 22 July 2011³; or
- is a new version of a qualification that had been accredited by 22 July 2011, and is accredited by the end of January 2012⁴.

² Established iGCSE is defined as “Accredited versions of qualifications which were being offered as ‘iGCSE’ and were being taken in independent and/or international schools before June 2010 when Ministers announced that they would allow the use of accredited iGCSE qualifications in maintained schools”

³ This is when the policy paper on 14-16 qualifications and performance tables was published

⁴ Ofqual cannot guarantee that it will be able to complete the accreditation of submitted qualifications by that date as accreditation is subject to the AOs’ submissions being of sufficient quality to meet the regulatory requirements

A2: Appropriate size – a qualification will need to be at least 120 GLH and this will need to be demonstrated by reference to evidence of actual teaching time.

A3: An appropriate content – a qualification will need to require the:

- development of an understanding of a particular curriculum area or vocational sector;
- acquisition of a significant transferable knowledge core that will support progression within that area of study or more broadly; and
- study of a subject matter that is appropriate for a qualification for this age group.

2.5 Qualifications that do not meet these three requirements will not be included in performance tables headline measures in 2014. The earliest that new qualifications will count in headline measures will be 2016. This includes new versions of qualifications that do not count in the 2014 tables.

B: Assessing evidence of other characteristics

2.6 Qualifications that meet the minimum requirements for inclusion in the headline measures will be assessed for evidence of the following additional characteristics:

- Grading
- External assessment
- Synoptic assessment
- Progression
- Proven Track Record

and assigned to one of the following four categories:

1. Qualifications that demonstrate all the characteristics.
2. Qualifications that are too new to have had the opportunity to demonstrate track record and progression (having first counted in performance tables **no earlier than 2011**), but demonstrate all other characteristics.
3. Qualifications that demonstrate all characteristics with the exception of external assessment, synoptic assessment and/or grading.
4. Qualifications that do not fall into the other categories (lacking evidence of track record and external assessment for example).

2.7 The next stage of the process is determined by the category assigned and further detail is set out below.

1. Qualifications that demonstrate all the characteristics

- 2.8 If a qualification demonstrates all the required characteristics, it will continue to count in performance tables in its current form and no action is required of the Awarding Organisation. As equivalences will have been removed, the qualification will count for 'one' in performance tables from 2014.

2. Qualifications that are too new to have had the opportunity to demonstrate track record and progression, but demonstrate all other characteristics

- 2.9 If a qualification has not counted in performance tables before 2011 it will be too new to demonstrate track record and progression. If it demonstrates the other required characteristics, the qualification will be included in performance tables while the Awarding Organisation gathers evidence for track record and progression. This evidence will be reviewed in the autumn after the first cohort has completed Year 11 (details of the review process are set out below).

3. Qualifications that demonstrate all characteristics with the exception of external assessment, synoptic assessment and/or grading

- 2.10 If a qualification demonstrates all the characteristics other than external assessment, synoptic assessment and/or grading, it can continue to count in performance tables for up to one grace year while the Awarding Organisation amends the qualification. As equivalences will have been removed, the qualification will count for "one" in performance tables from 2014. The current version of the qualification will not count in performance tables from 2015 when the new qualification, including the new assessment arrangements, first appears.
- 2.11 In addition to the amendments Awarding Organisations need to make in order to demonstrate the characteristics in full, Awarding Organisations may choose to make more substantial modifications such as to the size of their qualifications. Either way, prior to first teaching in September 2012 or September 2013, the qualification will need to have been accredited by Ofqual and had DfE approval that it now meets the characteristics its predecessor lacked.
- 2.12 All these qualifications will be reviewed in the autumn after the first cohort of students has completed Year 11.

4. Qualifications that do not fall into the other categories

- 2.13 If a qualification does not fall into the categories described above (lacking evidence of track record and external assessment for example), it will not count in performance tables in 2014.

Updating and reviewing the list of qualifications

- 2.14 The list will only be updated for new qualifications for 2016 performance tables.
- 2.15 When new qualifications, including new versions of existing qualifications, are accepted for inclusion, they will be reviewed in the autumn after the first cohort of students has completed Year 11. At this point Awarding Organisations will need to submit evidence that the qualification demonstrates all the required characteristics, including track record and progression. If the evidence is accepted, the qualification will continue to count in performance tables. If the evidence is not accepted the qualification will be withdrawn from the performance tables once all current students have completed their course.
- 2.16 Further detail on the process for updating the list will be provided in early 2012.

The position on Level 1 qualifications

- 2.17 A small number of Level 1 qualifications are likely to meet the characteristics as outlined above and will therefore be included in performance tables. In order to promote appropriate progression, we intend to also include the Level 1 qualifications which have a direct link to any Level 2 qualifications that meet the characteristics and are on the published list.

Performance tables and reforming equivalences

- 2.18 The current system gives each qualification a value in the Key Stage 4 performance tables based on an estimate of size up to 6.0 GCSEs – referred to as “equivalences”. There is clear evidence that this equivalence-based system creates perverse incentives to seek qualifications that attract heavy weighting for the tables, but in fact can be taught in less time than the weighting implies. We will reform equivalences in the Key Stage 4 tables by treating one qualification (provided it is at least 120 GLH) as “one” in the headline measures. Making such a change will help to cement the new approach and ensure clarity for schools and parents. This does not mean that larger qualifications cannot be taught, merely that they will only count for one in the tables.
- 2.19 We will encourage schools to focus on GCSEs and a narrower range of high quality vocational qualifications by limiting the number of so-called equivalent qualifications that count in the Key Stage 4 performance tables. Only a maximum of two qualifications per pupil that are not

GCSEs, established iGCSEs⁵ or AS levels will be counted in the headline measures in the performance tables from 2014.

- 2.20 From 2011 Tables we intend to publish key headline indicators both with and without old equivalences. This will allow parents and other members of the public to see the contribution that those equivalences make to school performance.

⁵ Established iGCSE is defined as “Accredited versions of qualifications which were being offered as ‘iGCSE’ and were being taken in independent and/or international schools before June 2010 when Ministers announced that they would allow the use of accredited iGCSE qualifications in maintained schools”

Next steps

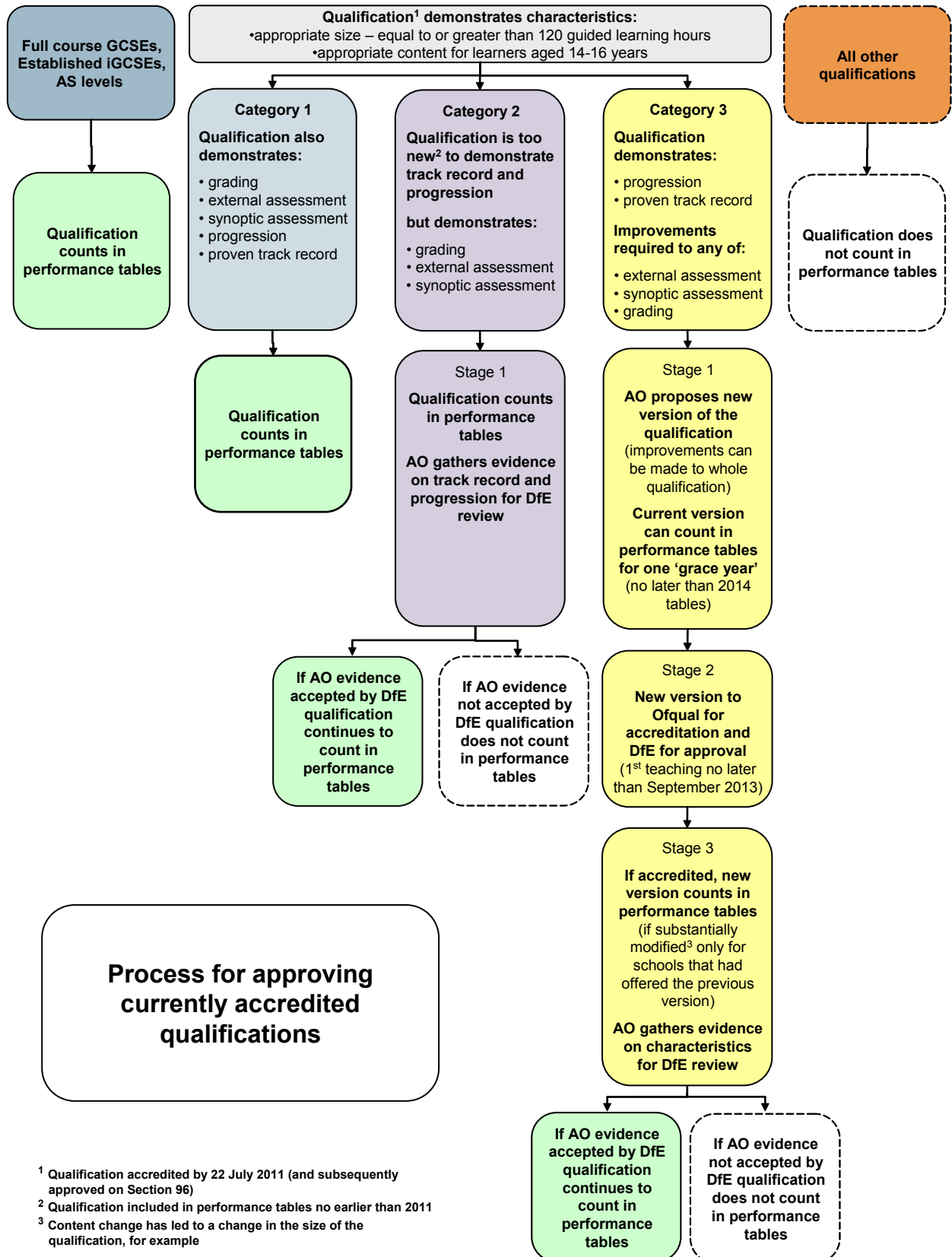
Key dates between October and January:

27 October 2011	Publication of the DfE response to the consultation on 14-16 qualifications and performance tables
30 November 2011	Deadline for Awarding Organisations to submit evidence of how each qualification demonstrates the required characteristics for inclusion in 2014 performance tables
End January 2012	Publication of the list of qualifications included in the 2014 performance tables

2.21 Where there is a strong case, minor refinements to some of these characteristics may still be considered. In the new year, we will publish:

- the lists of qualifications that fall into categories 1, 2 and 3 as set out on page 11;
- how the decisions have been made to determine which qualifications are on which list;
- what the process will be for the addition of new qualifications on to the list of qualifications that will count in the Key Stage 4 headline performance tables measures from September 2016.

Annex A: Process for approving currently accredited qualifications, and new versions of these qualifications, for inclusion in performance tables



¹ Qualification accredited by 22 July 2011 (and subsequently approved on Section 96)
² Qualification included in performance tables no earlier than 2011
³ Content change has led to a change in the size of the qualification, for example

Annex B: Consultation responses

We received over **250** responses to the consultation online and via e-mail. Almost half of these indicated they were **teachers or heads**. We received 16 online responses from those who stated they were **Awarding Organisations**.

Options	Responses	Across Consultation
Other:	99	37%
Teacher:	84	32%
Headteacher:	34	13%
Representative Body:	21	8%
Awarding Organisations:	16	6%
Learning Provider:	9	3%
Governor:	3	1%
Total:	266	100%

The concern raised by the greatest number of people (around a third of the total respondents) was that the new measures may lead schools to **only consider offering qualifications that could be included in performance tables**. The other concerns raised by numbers approaching this level were that the measures might **undervalue vocational qualifications** and that it may have a **negative impact** upon disengaged young people.

Respondents often expressed support for certain qualifications with **NVQs** gaining the most positive mentions. Out of the overall response the level of support for NVQs in general was 15%. This mostly comprised support for NVQs in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL); those writing from schools in support of NVQs in MFL comprised 12% of total contributions to the consultation. There was also support expressed for other qualifications, including BTECs, Functional Skills and Diplomas.

We have examined whether respondents agreed or disagreed with particular points and the issue which attracted the most interest was whether all qualifications should be deemed **equal to one GCSE**. A third of respondents raised this issue, of whom some 40% agreed, and 60% disagreed.

External assessment was an issue for a quarter of respondents with an even split on whether qualifications should contain a substantial amount of external assessment. **Synoptic assessment** and **grading** were less important issues, being raised by only around 15%. There was an even divide on synoptic assessment and support for grading.

Providing for **broad progression** was an important issue with almost one quarter responding on this point, overwhelmingly in agreement that good qualifications allow for this. Around the same number responded on whether a **maximum of two vocational qualifications** should be allowed to be included with most of these arguing that more should be permitted.

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