



Department  
for Education

# Qualifications for 14-16 Year Olds and Performance Tables

**2015 Performance Tables:  
Technical Guidance for Awarding  
Organisations**

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# Qualifications for 14-16 Year Olds: 2015 Performance Tables

## Technical guidance for Awarding Organisations

### Introduction

Professor Alison Wolf carried out an independent review of vocational education that was published in March 2011. The review considered how to raise the standards of vocational education for 14 – 19 year olds and promote successful progression into the labour market and into higher level education and training routes. The Department for Education (DfE) accepted all 27 of the recommendations in the report.

In her report, Professor Wolf recommended that: *‘The DfE should distinguish clearly between those qualifications, both vocational and academic, which can contribute to performance indicators at Key Stage 4, and those which cannot.’*

Following the Wolf Review, the Department consulted on the characteristics to determine which qualifications should be included in performance tables as equivalent to a GCSE. In October 2011, the Department published its response to the consultation and announced that:

- From 2014, only qualifications that are at least the size of a GCSE, high quality, rigorous and enable progression to a range of study and employment opportunities will be included in school performance tables for 14-16 year olds.
- Only a maximum of two qualifications per pupil that are not GCSEs, established iGCSEs<sup>1</sup> or AS levels will be included in the 5 A\*-C including English and maths measure.

Awarding Organisations were asked to submit existing qualifications for approval for inclusion within school performance tables and officials assessed each qualification according to the Technical Guidance that was published in the consultation response on 27 October 2011. In March 2012 the DfE published a final list of 140 qualifications that will count in the Key Stage 4 Performance Tables in 2014. This represents a 96% reduction in non-GCSE/iGCSE qualifications that count in school performance tables.

This document provides Awarding Organisations with the technical information they need to submit qualifications for approval for the 2015 performance tables. Only qualifications that count in 2014 performance tables, or redeveloped versions of these qualifications, will be eligible for consideration for these tables. New qualifications will be considered for inclusion in the 2016 performance tables; we will publish information on that process in due course.

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<sup>1</sup> 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”

DfE and Ofqual have streamlined the process for approving qualifications for the 2015 performance tables. A single application will be submitted to Ofqual who will assess qualifications for some of the characteristics at the same time as considering their accreditation. DfE will then be responsible for making the final decisions on which qualifications will count as equivalent to a GCSE in the performance tables. The roles of Ofqual and DfE are discussed in greater detail below.

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

- size;
- grading;
- external assessment;
- synoptic assessment;
- appropriate content;
- progression (required after the first year of awarding);
- proven track record (required after the first year of awarding).

The criteria for assessing each of these characteristics are set out below. Qualifications that demonstrate these characteristics are those which are believed to provide most pupils with successful progression to the next stage of education, training or employment.

There may be pupils for whom the most appropriate qualifications are those not included in the performance tables. Where it is in a pupil's best interest, the school is encouraged to teach qualifications not included on the list. Subject to a general suitability check, all qualifications accredited by Ofqual for teaching to 14-16 year olds will also be approved under section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to be funded for teaching in schools. Achievement data for all qualifications taken by 14-16 year olds, regardless of whether they are included in the Key Stage 4 performance tables, will be published by the DfE on an annual basis.

The list of qualifications that will count in the Key Stage 4 Performance Tables in 2015 will be published on the DfE website in November 2012. Until the list is finalised, schools should be advised to exercise caution in making changes to their timetables in anticipation of a particular qualification being approved.

## Categories of Qualification

The guidance contained within this document applies to all non-GCSE qualifications to be considered for inclusion in the 2015 performance tables. Qualifications eligible for inclusion will fall into one of the following categories:

- The qualification demonstrates all characteristics and was approved as such for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables.
- The qualification was approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables with future inclusion subject to review of progression and proven track record.
- The qualification is a redeveloped version of a qualification that was approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables.
- The qualification is at Level 1 and has a direct link to a Level 2 qualification that will be included in the 2015 performance tables.

Any qualification that does not fall into one of the above categories will be treated as a new qualification and will be eligible to be considered for inclusion in the 2016 performance tables, subject to any future policy or process changes. In line with longer term GCSE reforms, vocational qualifications will be required to demonstrate greater rigour in the future; Awarding Organisations are advised to await further guidance on requirements for the 2016 performance tables.

Any qualification that is due to expire on or before 31 August 2013 (including Phase 1 Principal Learning qualifications) will be removed from the 2015 performance tables. We will contact relevant Awarding Organisations about these qualifications by June 2012; Awarding Organisations should notify DfE of any change to the status of any such qualifications before 31 October 2012.

## Section 1: Characteristics and evidence requirements of qualifications that will feature in 2015 performance tables

Non-GCSE qualifications, accredited by Ofqual, will need to demonstrate characteristics appropriate to their category in order to be considered for inclusion in the 2015 Key Stage 4 performance tables. Each characteristic is described in detail below, including the justification for its use and the requirements that will need to be met for a qualification to be included in the performance tables. For redeveloped qualifications, some characteristics will be judged by Ofqual following accreditation; other characteristics will continue to be judged by DfE.

### Characteristics required of redeveloped qualifications

Redeveloped versions of qualifications on the 2014 list will need to demonstrate all five of the characteristics below (A to E) to be added to the 2015 list. Four of these characteristics (A to D) will be judged by Ofqual on behalf of DfE, in parallel with the accreditation process.

#### **A. Appropriate size**

##### *Detail*

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

##### *Justification for this characteristic*

- 1.2 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 teaching, study or training takes place. This supports the synoptic assessment characteristic to ensure students have a coherent programme of study.
- 1.3 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 performance tables.

*How judgement will be reached*

- 1.4 The GLH value is identified when a qualification is submitted for accreditation to Ofqual. The specification should include detail on how the total GLH is reached, including a breakdown of units. For qualifications that have a range of total GLH dependent on the combination of units studied, the minimum overall size should be no less than 120GLH.

## **B. Grading**

*Detail*

- 1.5 To be included in performance tables, qualifications must be graded i.e. qualifications will have a pass, merit, distinction structure or a more detailed scale. Grading must apply to the overall qualification, but individual units may also be graded.

*Justification for this characteristic*

- 1.6 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.

*How judgement will be reached*

- 1.7 The grading/mark scheme must be available in the qualification specification submitted to Ofqual for accreditation. It must explain how final grades are derived from all formal assessments, particularly where not all individual units or assessments are graded.

## **C. External assessment**

*Detail*

- 1.8 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.”*

- 1.9 To be included in performance tables, qualifications must have a significant amount of content that is subject to external assessment, with a minimum tariff set as follows:

Qualification Overall Size	External Assessment Minimum Size
120GLH	24GLH
121-180GLH	30GLH
181-240GLH	45GLH
245GLH & above	60GLH

These minimum values apply to redeveloped versions of qualifications submitted for inclusion in the 2015 performance tables. In future years, these figures are subject to increase, with the absolute minimum amount of external assessment in new qualifications anticipated at 30GLH.

- 1.10 For a very small number of qualifications, in subjects such as art & design, it may not be possible to accommodate the definition of external assessment given above. Such qualifications will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and the expectation is that the approach taken in similar subject GCSE qualifications will be adopted. AOs should clearly identify any such qualifications along with a clear explanation of how external assessment will be incorporated.

*Justification for this characteristic*

- 1.11 Evidence of rigorous assessment arrangements, including a substantial amount of external assessment, is 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*

- 1.12 Awarding Organisations will need to ensure that the specification contains sufficient detail in order that Ofqual can make a judgement.

## **D. Synoptic assessment**

*Detail*

- 1.13 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 skills, techniques, concepts, theories, and knowledge from across the whole vocational area, which are relevant to a key task.”*



- 1.14 We have not set a minimum contribution to the final grade that synoptic assessment must provide. It must 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*

- 1.15 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*

- 1.16 Awarding Organisations will need to demonstrate in the specification how the qualification meets the agreed definition and includes synoptic assessment. Awarding Organisations may decide on the most appropriate format for incorporating this information into the specification, but it must be sufficiently detailed for a judgement to be made.

The following characteristic will be assessed by DfE. Redeveloped qualifications will need to meet this characteristic to be added to the 2015 list.

## **E. Appropriate content**

*Detail*

- 1.17 Qualifications should be able to demonstrate that they will support young people to:
- develop a broad and comprehensive understanding of a particular curriculum area or vocational sector, whilst the acquisition of specialist knowledge and/or practical skills should be limited;
  - acquire a significant knowledge core which spans the curriculum area or vocational sector, as well as academic and study skills that will support progression within the area of study and more broadly; and
  - study a subject matter that is appropriate for a qualification for this age group, particularly where a qualification was originally developed for the adult market.
- 1.18 Qualifications for Key Stage 4 learners should be focussed on taught or supervised content delivery. A significant core of content must be aligned to the broad curriculum area or vocational sector. The qualification should not be dominated by specialist or skills-based content, whilst recognising this is important where appropriate and in proportion to the core of the qualification.

The qualification's content should incorporate breadth and depth of study, as well as challenge and stretch that are appropriate to the level of the qualification. Qualifications may develop some practical skills, but these should be under-pinned by core knowledge and understanding. The content and/or structure of a qualification should not allow excessive specialisation through pathways which divert learners away from sufficient coverage of core knowledge in the area.

#### *Justification for this characteristic*

- 1.19 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*

- 1.20 AOs are expected to demonstrate within the specification that all components and combinations of the qualification meet this characteristic, as set out in the detailed definition. The specification should illustrate that there is:
- a significant proportion of knowledge acquisition compared to skills development;
  - a significant proportion of core knowledge compared to specialist or generic knowledge.

## **Characteristics required of qualifications after their first year of awarding**

These characteristics (F and G below) will be judged by DfE. Qualifications in the 2014 performance tables that were first awarded in 2011, or are being awarded for the first time in 2012, will need to demonstrate these characteristics to be included in the 2015 performance tables.

### **F. Progression**

#### *Detail*

- 1.21 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*

- 1.22 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.

*How judgement will be reached*

- 1.23 The DfE will be looking for qualitative evidence from Awarding Organisations that the qualification is a passport to study at the next level, both within the same vocational sector or curriculum area and more broadly. The evidence should demonstrate that the students' options will not be restricted by taking this qualification. The evidence could include written statements from colleges or a range of published documents, such as handbooks or statements of entry requirements from 6th forms, colleges or Apprenticeship programmes. These should specify that the qualification is recognised and acceptable for entry to a range of post-16 options (for example, a L2 vocational qualification might be eligible to count as part of a 6<sup>th</sup> form college's requirements for students to have 5 GCSEs at A\*-C). Unsubstantiated assertions from AOs of progression opportunities will not be considered sufficient evidence.
- 1.24 Awarding Organisations will be asked to put forward evidence of progression for all qualifications that are in the 2014 tables and that were awarded for the first time in 2011 or are being awarded for the first time in 2012. Qualifications that are first awarded after 2012 and demonstrate all other characteristics except track record and progression will be included in 2015 tables, with inclusion in future years subject to review. Our aim is to introduce a quantitative aspect of the progression characteristic in future years as the Key Stage 4 destinations measures are developed.

**G. Proven track record**

*Detail*

- 1.25 In order to determine track record, qualifications will need to have been completed by at least 100 young people and in at least five centres during the first year that they are awarded.

*Justification for this characteristic*

- 1.26 A low number of completions demonstrates that 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 there is a risk that the qualification may not have sufficient currency.

*How judgement will be reached*

- 1.27 The DfE will use its records of completion data. Awarding Organisations may opt to provide completion data for a qualification, but it is not essential as DfE data will be used to make the final judgement.
- 1.28 Qualifications that are already included in the 2014 tables, and that were awarded for the first time in 2011 or are being awarded for the first time in 2012, will be subject to a review of track record based on the number of completions in 2012. Qualifications that are first awarded after 2012 and demonstrate all other characteristics except track record and progression will be included in 2015 tables, with inclusion in future years subject to review.

## Section 2: The process for approving accredited qualifications for inclusion in the 2015 performance tables

Qualifications that are not GCSEs, established iGCSEs<sup>2</sup> and AS levels will need to demonstrate the characteristics described in Section 1 in order to be included in the 2015 school performance tables. The process for approving these qualifications for inclusion is set out below, with a diagram of the process included at Annex A.

### Entry routes into the 2015 performance tables

- 2.1 A qualification may only count in the 2015 school performance tables if it falls into one of the following categories:
- The qualification demonstrates all characteristics and was approved as such for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables.
  - The qualification was approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables with future inclusion subject to review of progression and proven track record.
  - The qualification is a redeveloped version of a qualification that was approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables.
  - The qualification is at Level 1 and has a direct link to a Level 2 qualification that will be included in the 2015 performance tables.
- 2.2 Qualifications that do not meet these requirements will not be included in performance tables. The earliest that new qualifications may count in performance tables will be 2016.

### Evidence requirements

The evidence required and the process for submission and assessment will be determined by the category of the qualification. Details are outlined below.

#### **The qualification demonstrates all characteristics and was approved as such for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables**

- 2.3 No further evidence will be required; the qualification will continue to count in 2015 performance tables. We will confirm these qualifications with relevant Awarding Organisations by June 2012.

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<sup>2</sup> 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”

**The qualification was approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables subject to future review of progression and proven track record**

- 2.4 For qualifications awarded for the first time in 2011 or 2012, evidence will be required of how the progression and proven track record characteristics are demonstrated.
- 2.5 Awarding Organisations will need to submit evidence of progression directly to the DfE. Evidence of proven track record is held by DfE and will be used to make final judgements, although Awarding Organisations may opt to submit their own evidence of proven track record if they wish to do so. DfE will assess these characteristics.
- 2.6 No evidence will be required for qualifications awarded for the first time in 2013; they will continue to count in the 2015 performance tables. Inclusion in future years will be subject to demonstration of progression and proven track record in the first year of awarding.

**The qualification is a redeveloped version of a qualification approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables**

- 2.7 Evidence will be required demonstrating that the qualification meets the size, grading, external assessment, synoptic assessment and appropriate content characteristics. Ofqual will assess the size, grading, external assessment and synoptic assessment characteristics. DfE will assess the appropriate content characteristic. Qualifications demonstrating these characteristics will be included in 2015 performance tables, with inclusion in future years subject to review of proven track record and progression characteristics in the first year of awarding. Where a qualification structure contains different pathways and options, Awarding Organisations should ensure that all possible combinations satisfy all of the relevant characteristics.
- 2.8 To qualify as redeveloped, there must be no significant new content that changes the fundamental nature of the qualification from its predecessor. A summary of changes will be required at the time of submission, and predecessor and successor qualifications will be cross-referenced by DfE when a judgement on the appropriate content characteristic is made. If there are significant content changes that alter the fundamental nature of the qualification, it will be deemed to be new and will not be eligible for inclusion in the 2015 performance tables.
- 2.9 Awarding Organisations will need to indicate that a redeveloped version of a qualification should be considered for inclusion in performance tables when they submit for accreditation to Ofqual. The qualification specification must be uploaded to RITS when accreditation is sought and must contain sufficient detail to enable judgement of all the characteristics. If changes are made to the specification during the accreditation process, Awarding Organisations must ensure that the final version of the specification is uploaded to RITS.

**The qualification is at Level 1 and is being submitted for inclusion on the list because it has a direct link to a Level 2 qualification that will be included in the 2015 performance tables**

- 2.10 A Level 1 qualification may be included in the 2015 performance tables on the basis of a direct link to a Level 2 qualification that has been approved for inclusion. Evidence will be required of the existence and rationale for claiming a direct link. Awarding Organisations will need to submit this directly to DfE and DfE will make this assessment.
- 2.11 A direct link may be demonstrated by:
- a single specification covering qualifications at Levels 1 and 2;
  - a specific reference to the link between the Level 1 and Level 2 versions of the qualification within the specification approved by Ofqual at the point of accreditation;
  - Level 1 and Level 2 versions of a qualification with the same units (at the appropriate level) and the same name.
- 2.12 The only exception to this is where the Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications (and therefore also the link between them) remain unchanged from the versions approved for inclusion in the 2014 performance tables. We will confirm these qualifications with the relevant Awarding Organisations by June 2012.

## Process and timeline

- 2.13 Awarding Organisations will be able to request that a **redeveloped version** of a qualification is considered for inclusion in the 2015 performance tables when they submit to Ofqual for accreditation. This can be done by uploading a form with their submission to Ofqual that indicates they want the information to be shared with DfE for this purpose. The form will also need to include evidence of how the qualification has been redeveloped. All submissions to Ofqual made by 3 September 2012 will be considered under the 2015 process. Submissions made after this point may be considered if timescales permit, but all qualifications must be accredited by 31 October 2012 to be considered for the 2015 performance tables.
- 2.14 Awarding Organisations will need to submit a form indicating they want a **Level 1 qualification directly linked to a Level 2 qualification** to be considered for inclusion in the 2015 tables, directly to DfE and by 12 October 2012. This form must include evidence of the link between the two qualifications.
- 2.15 DfE will contact all relevant Awarding Organisations by June 2012 to request evidence of progression for **qualifications that are subject to review of progression and track record** in autumn 2012. Evidence will need to be submitted to DfE by 12 October 2012.
- 2.16 DfE will make operational details, including proformas and submission addresses, available to Awarding Organisations in due course.

- 2.17 A list of qualifications to that will count in 2015 performance tables will be published at the end of November 2012. Awarding Organisations will be notified of outcomes for their qualifications in advance of this publication; more detailed feedback about qualifications that will not count in 2015 performance tables will follow.
- 2.18 Awarding Organisations will have the opportunity to request reviews of decisions if they disagree with the assessments of the evidence submitted. The deadline for doing this will be the first week of December 2012. Evidence will be considered a second time by someone who did not make the original assessment. Outcomes for requested reviews will be made available to Awarding Organisations, and any necessary amendments to the list of qualifications to be included in the 2015 performance tables will be made by the end of January 2013.

## Key dates

May 2012	Publication of technical guidance on submissions to 2015 performance tables
3 September 2012	Recommended deadline for Awarding Organisations to submit redeveloped versions of qualifications to Ofqual for approval and consideration for 2015 performance tables
12 October 2012	Deadline for submissions of evidence for progression (and, optionally, proven track record) for qualifications subject to review for inclusion in 2015 performance tables and for submissions of Level 1 qualifications to be considered for inclusion on the basis of a direct link to a Level 2 qualification.
31 October 2012	Qualifications must be accredited by this date to be considered for inclusion in 2015 performance tables.
End November 2012	Publication of the list of qualifications included in the 2015 performance tables
7 December 2012	Deadline for Awarding Organisations to request a review of decisions about 2015 performance tables
End January 2013	Amendments to the list of qualifications made where relevant following review process



# Annex A: Process for approving qualifications for 2015 performance tables

