



Department
for Education

Vocational qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds

**2017 and 2018 performance tables:
technical guidance for awarding
organisations**

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Summary

About this technical guidance

Vocational Qualifications for 16-19 year olds, 2017 and 2018 performance tables: technical guidance for awarding organisations, supports the annual review of vocational qualifications for recognition in the school and college performance tables. It sets out the process for awarding organisations to submit qualifications to the Department for Education (DfE) for approval as Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications.

Who is this technical guidance for?

This technical guidance is primarily for awarding organisations, but will also be of interest to anyone involved in the education of 16-19 year olds.

Key points

- In December 2013, DfE published the first lists of Tech Level and Applied General qualifications approved against DfE's 'interim requirements' for teaching from September 2014 and recognition within the school and college performance tables in 2016.
- In late autumn 2014, DfE will publish lists of Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications approved against the 'interim requirements' for teaching from September 2015 and recognition within the 2017 performance tables. DfE will also publish the first lists of Tech Level and Applied General qualifications approved against the 'full requirements'.
- In addition, DfE will publish the first list of level 2 vocational qualifications that have been approved against the 'interim requirements' for teaching from September 2015 and recognition within the 2017 performance tables. These qualifications, known as Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, cover occupations where employers recognise entry at this level or where a particular level 2 qualification is required before a student can progress to a Tech Level.
- There is a separate process for approving qualifications for 14-16 year olds. Please see *Technical Awards for 14-16 year olds, 2017 and 2018 performance tables: technical guidance for awarding organisations*.

Foreword



Every young person should have the opportunity to leave education capable of getting a good job, a place at university or an Apprenticeship. In the past, students aged 16-19 have faced a bewildering number of course options, with little clarity about which ones would help them get a job or a place at university. This is against the backdrop of our wider changes to the whole education system – ensuring it is more closely linked to the world of work and backed by leading employers. Our reforms offer a clear path from study to employment with students grounded in crucial subjects like English and maths but given the chance to do practical study relevant to their future careers.

In March we released '[Getting the Job Done: The Government's Reform Plan for Vocational Qualifications](#)'. This plan set out the importance of high quality vocational qualifications in contributing to a vibrant and growing economy and an education and skills system that helps people to acquire new competences and abilities.

In issuing this technical guidance, I task awarding organisations to continue to further improve the quality of the qualifications, they offer. There are now more than 200 Tech Levels endorsed by employers and professional bodies and 90 Applied General qualifications recognised by universities. These, alongside A levels, are the only level 3 qualifications which will be recognised in the school and college performance tables for 16-19 year olds. The additional quality requirements for these qualifications, set out in this technical guidance, will ensure that students have the confidence that the qualifications are of a high quality and are the right ones for the occupation or vocational sector they plan to enter.

This technical guidance also introduces Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2. These provide students seeking entry to a skilled trade or occupation at a more basic level with the same confidence that the qualification they are taking will be of benefit to them and is genuinely valued by employers. School and college performance tables will also recognise attainment in these qualifications in the same way as they do in relation to level 3 qualifications.

Together these reforms cover the full range of vocational and technical qualifications students might take at 16-19. They provide young people with a broad range of options to secure a good job, a place at university or an Apprenticeship.

Matthew Hancock

Minister for Enterprise and Skills

Section 1: Introduction

1. This technical guidance provides awarding organisations with the information they need to submit 16-19 vocational qualifications at levels 2 and 3 to DfE for approval and inclusion on the 2017 and/or 2018 school and college performance tables lists. Awarding organisations should note that this is an annual process.
2. Section 1 provides the context for reform of vocational qualifications for 14-19 year olds. Section 2 provides further information on the characteristics of the 'full requirements' set out in the 2016 technical guidance. The process for submission and approval of qualifications is explained in section 3.
3. This year, DfE has been more explicit about its high expectations for all vocational qualifications for 14-19 year olds. Awarding organisations are encouraged to exceed the minimum requirements (set out in section 2 of this document for 16-19 qualifications and in the parallel document for 14-16 qualifications) wherever such an approach would lead to higher quality qualifications.
4. The lists of qualifications that will be recognised in the school and college performance tables in 2017 will be published on the gov.uk website in late autumn 2014. The lists of recognised qualifications for the 2018 performance tables will be published on the gov.uk website in autumn 2015.
5. Wider reforms to vocational qualifications, GCSEs, A levels performance tables and other qualifications eligible to be included in performance tables are also summarised in this document.

Background

6. In her 2011 review of vocational education, Professor Wolf found that 350,000 16-19 year olds were taking qualifications each year which were of very limited value, either to them or employers. Schools and colleges were being rewarded for encouraging students to take qualifications which were easy to pass. In response to Professor Wolf's recommendations, the government has reformed the way 16-19 education is funded, to ensure schools and colleges offer study programmes based on genuinely valuable qualifications. The government has also introduced tough new performance measures to show how well schools and colleges are preparing their students for further or higher education or employment.
7. With over 3,700 level 3 vocational qualifications available for 16-19 year olds in 2013, students, their parents and employers have often struggled to identify the vocational qualifications that are right for them. By only recognising high-value vocational qualifications in performance tables, these reforms are encouraging schools and colleges to offer vocational qualifications that genuinely support progression to higher education and/or skilled employment.

Reform of vocational qualifications

8. DfE only approves qualifications for recognition in school and college performance tables that support progression to learning at the next level or skilled employment. DfE identifies these qualifications by reviewing qualifications nominated by awarding organisations against the characteristic requirements set out in section 2 of this document.

9. Vocational qualifications that fail to demonstrate evidence of student progression are removed from performance tables. Over 90% of the level 3 vocational qualifications currently recognised within the performance tables will not be recognised in the performance tables in 2016. Those qualifications that continue to be recognised include over 200 Tech Levels and 90 Applied General qualifications. These reforms affect courses starting in September 2014.

10. From 2017, Technical Awards for 14-16 year olds and Tech Levels, Applied General qualifications and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 for 16-19 year olds will be the only vocational qualifications recognised in performance tables. As the purposes of key stage 4 and post-16 education are different, a level 2 qualification can only be considered for approval as either a Technical Award in 14-16 performance tables or a Substantial Vocational Qualification in the school and college performance tables.

11. Similarly, a level 3 qualification will only be recognised in one qualification category. This will ensure that all qualifications that are reported in performance tables – whether vocational or academic – are recognised as distinct and respected components of a 16-19 study programme.

12. Academic and vocational pathways for 14-19 year olds, following DfE's qualification and accountability reforms, are illustrated in Annex A. These reforms provide high-status vocational pathways alongside the traditional A level route and will lead to employment, university or an Apprenticeship at age 18/19.

13. Schools and colleges remain free to offer any qualifications that have section 96 approval under the Learning and Skills Act (2000) for teaching to students aged 16-18, even if these qualifications are not recognised in performance tables. DfE publishes achievement data for all qualifications taken by 16-19 year olds on an annual basis.

Key stage 4: Technical Awards

14. Technical Awards are broad, high-quality level 1 and level 2 qualifications in non-English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects that equip students with applied knowledge and associated practical skills not usually acquired through general education. Technical Awards may focus on applied study of an industry sector or occupational group, or the acquisition of practical or technical skills. These qualifications will fulfil entry requirements for both academic and vocational study post-16, alongside GCSEs.

15. Qualifications that focus on a particular occupation and, as a result, could limit a 16 year old's progression opportunities, will not be approved as Technical Awards.

16. At key stage 4, students are encouraged to take five academic GCSEs from the list of EBacc subjects. Up to three Technical Awards will count towards Progress 8 and Attainment 8 performance measures in the schools performance tables.

Key stage 5: Level 2 and 3 vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds

17. At 16, students may choose to study via academic, vocational or combined routes. In addition to academic qualifications, there are three vocational options for 16-19 year olds:

- **Applied General qualifications** – these are rigorous advanced (level 3) qualifications that equip students with transferable knowledge and skills. They are for post-16 students wanting to continue their education through applied learning. They fulfil entry requirements for a range of higher education courses, either by meeting entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside and adding value to other qualifications at the same level.
- **Tech Levels** – these are rigorous advanced (level 3) technical qualifications, on a par with A levels and recognised by employers. They are for post-16 students wishing to specialise in a specific industry, occupation or occupational group¹. They equip a student with specialist knowledge and skills, enabling entry to an Apprenticeship or other employment, or progression to a related higher education course. In some cases, these qualifications provide a 'licence to practise' or exemption from professional exams. Tech Levels are one of three components of the new Technical Baccalaureate (TechBacc) performance table measure. For further information on the TechBacc measure, please refer to paragraph 26.
- **Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2** – these are rigorous intermediate (level 2) technical qualifications for post-16 students wishing to specialise in a specific industry, occupation or occupational group. They cover occupations where employers recognise entry at level 2 or where a level 2 qualification is required before students can progress to a Tech Level. They equip students with specialist knowledge and skills, enabling entry to an Apprenticeship, employment or progression to a Tech Level. In some cases, they provide a 'licence to practise' or exemption from professional exams.

¹ The term 'occupation and occupational group' refers to 4-digit and 3-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) coding, where 4-digit SOC codes relate to specific job titles e.g. laboratory technician and 3-digit SOC codes relate to the host 'minor group' e.g. Science, Engineering and Production Technicians.

Ofqual's regulation of vocational qualifications

18. Ofqual is changing the way it regulates vocational qualifications and has started to discuss with awarding organisations its expectations for the design, development, assessment and delivery of all qualifications. This approach is learning relevant lessons from the reform of general qualifications. Ofqual will also set out its approach to improved regulatory scrutiny through the full life cycle of a qualification.

19. In assessing whether an awarding organisation's qualification is fit for purpose Ofqual will, using a risk approach, collect evidence about the process of qualification development, including approaches for designing the content and assessment and the performance standards set. In addition, there will be increased focus on the expectation for awarding organisations to engage with the qualification's end users, to provide feedback on whether the purpose of the qualification has been met over time. This approach is strengthened by Ofqual's ability to provide guidance and implement sanctions when qualifications are not meeting expected standards.

20. Qualifications must be included on Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications to be considered for recognition in performance tables. The final decisions on which qualifications meet the requirements will continue to rest with DfE.

Reform of A levels

21. A levels are being reformed to ensure that the qualifications equip students for higher education and to make them linear (i.e. with the exam at the end of two years), allowing more time for teaching and learning.

22. The first new linear A levels are planned to be introduced for teaching in September 2015 and reported in performance tables from 2017. As the new A levels become linear, the AS will be entirely decoupled from the A level, so that the marks do not count towards the final A level grade.

Reform of 16-19 accountability arrangements

23. The government recently published its plans for reformed accountability systems for 16-19 year olds². DfE will publish a set of clear, headline measures to give a snapshot of the performance of schools and colleges. It is planned to introduce these measures in the 2016 performance tables (published in January 2017) and they will apply to both schools and colleges. They include:

² [Consultation response 16-19 accountability](#)

- progress (and a combined attainment / completion measure);
- attainment;
- English and maths GCSE progress measure (for students at grade C or above at age 16);
- retention;
- destinations.

24. DfE aims to include information on qualifications below level 3 in performance tables, starting with English and maths from 2016 and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 from 2017.

25. For each of the three categories of 16-19 vocational qualifications – Applied General qualifications, Tech Levels and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 – the headline attainment measure will show the average point score attained across all entries, expressed as a vocational grade³.

26. DfE will also publish the number of students at each school and college that achieve the Technical Baccalaureate (TechBacc). The TechBacc is a performance table measure that will report the number of students achieving a Tech Level, an approved level 3 maths qualification and an Extended Project qualification. The measure is being introduced for courses starting in September 2014 and reported in school and college performance tables from 2016.

27. The approved level 3 maths qualifications include new Core Maths qualifications to be introduced for teaching in September 2015. In April-May 2014, DfE consulted on draft technical guidance, setting out the requirements for Core Maths qualifications⁴.

Reform of vocational qualifications post-19

28. Following its 2012 review of the publicly-funded qualifications offer, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) removed from public funding 1,800 qualifications which had low or no publicly funded enrolments. In January 2014, the SFA announced the removal of a further 1,000 qualifications with low or no demand.

29. The SFA has implemented a new set of business rules for the approval of qualifications for funding, which took effect from January 2014. The rules reflect DfE's requirements for vocational qualifications, set out in this technical guidance, in order that the offers for young people and young adults are more closely aligned.

³ This is likely to be based on grades for the BTEC Subsidiary Diploma: Distinction*/Distinction/Merit/Pass/Fail.

⁴ [Core maths technical guidance](#)

30. Recognising that adults may have different needs, aspirations and ambitions to young people, the SFA business rules build on the principles of the Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England⁵. Technical qualifications that already meet DfE's requirements for 16-19 year olds (Tech Levels and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2) or respond to a government priority will automatically be approved for government funding⁶. Other qualifications, including Applied General qualifications, will need to meet the new rules in order to be approved.

31. In March 2014, the government published its Reform Plan for Vocational Qualifications⁷. This sets out the reforms already implemented for post-16 vocational qualifications and outlines the design principles for vocational qualifications and improving the regulatory system.

Apprenticeship reform

32. Following feedback from employers and other stakeholders, the government is reforming Apprenticeships to make them more rigorous and responsive to the needs of both small and large employers.

33. The reforms will:

- **put employers in the driving seat** when designing Apprenticeships so they respond to the needs of industry.
- **simplify Apprenticeship standards** replacing long, complex frameworks with short, simple, accessible standards, written by employers in a language they understand.
- **increase the quality of Apprenticeships** through more rigorous testing at the end of the Apprenticeship and the introduction of grading.

34. There will be higher expectations for English and maths within Apprenticeships, a 12 month minimum duration regardless of age or prior experience, and more assessment at the end.

35. Trailblazers, led by employers and professional bodies, are developing the new Apprenticeship standards, building on what already exists to ensure that professionalism and the quality of training are the primary focus.

36. The first Trailblazers were announced in October 2013 and represent a broad spectrum of businesses from a range of sectors: aerospace, automotive, digital industries, electro-technical, energy and utilities, financial services, food and drink, and

⁵ [Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications in England](#)

⁶ [Information on adult qualifications approved for public funding](#)

⁷ [Government Reform Plan for Vocational Qualifications](#)

life and industrial sciences. A second phase of Trailblazers was announced in March 2014, in 29 sectors that include: butchery, dental health, aviation, housing, maritime, construction, civil service, horticulture, travel, property services.

37. The leading employers involved in these Trailblazers are collaborating to design Apprenticeships to make them world-class. The standards produced by the Trailblazers⁸ will become the standards for Apprenticeships in these occupations.

38. The Trailblazers will pave the way for full implementation of the reforms during 2015/16 and 2016/17 with the aim that all new apprentices from 2017/18 will be on new programmes and working towards new standards.

39. As the new standards are developed and agreed, funding for former Apprenticeship frameworks will stop.

⁸ [Apprenticeships standards](#)

Section 2: Characteristics required of vocational qualifications recognised in 2017 and 2018 performance tables

40. All vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds need to demonstrate the characteristics required for either Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels, or Applied General qualifications to be recognised in the 2017 and 2018 performance tables.

Characteristic	Technical Qualifications		Applied General qualifications (level 3)
	Substantial Vocational Qualifications (level 2)	Tech Level qualifications (level 3)	
Characteristics that must be demonstrated to meet the interim and full requirements			
A. Declared purpose	X	X	X
B. Size	X	X	X
C. Recognition	X	X	X
Additional characteristics that must be demonstrated to meet the full requirements			
D. Appropriate content	First judged in 2015 for 2018 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables
E. Appropriate assessment	First judged in 2015 for 2018 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables
F. Synoptic assessment	First judged in 2015 for 2018 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables
G. Grading	First judged in 2015 for 2018 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables
H. Employer involvement	First judged in 2015 for 2018 tables	First judged in 2014 for 2017 tables	Not applicable
Characteristics that must be demonstrated within the first two years of awarding			
I. Progression	X	X	X
J. Track record	X	X	X

Table 1: Characteristics required for each category of qualification for interim and full requirements

NB Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications submitted in September 2014 that do not meet the full requirements, may be approved against the interim requirements. Qualifications that do not receive approval against the full requirements at this time will need to be resubmitted and meet the full requirements to be recognised in the 2018 performance tables.

Characteristics that all qualifications must demonstrate to meet the interim and full requirements

A. Declared purpose

41. Awarding organisations must be clear about the aims, objectives and intended purpose of their qualifications and must provide a detailed Purpose Statement for each qualification. A clear Purpose Statement will help students make informed decisions about which qualification(s) to take.
42. Ofqual's regulatory requirements are broader than this and additionally include expectations that a qualification's objective is supported by the design of the qualification, including the content that it covers, the approaches to assessment used and the performance standard set. Regulation by Ofqual, focused across the whole qualification life cycle, provides assurance that a qualification is fit for purpose (i.e. valid) over time, and that action will be taken if it is not.

Requirement

43. A Purpose Statement must accurately reflect and clearly explain a qualification's content, and signal what the student will learn by studying the qualification and what skills and competences will be developed.
44. A Purpose Statement for a Tech Level or a Substantial Vocational Qualification at level 2 must explicitly state which occupation or occupational group they prepare the student for. A Purpose Statement for an Applied General qualification must explicitly state that the qualification supports progression to a range of subjects at a higher level of learning.
45. Where a qualification is part of a suite, the Purpose Statement must provide information to enable a student to choose one qualification instead of another. For example, they may prepare the student for different job roles or a larger qualification may enable additional knowledge/skills acquisition that a smaller qualification does not. This will help students make an informed decision about which qualification is right for them.

Evidence sought

46. Awarding organisations must publish a Purpose Statement for each qualification on their website, alongside or as part of the qualification specification. This must clearly explain the purpose of a qualification, in terms that are meaningful and relevant to students considering their post-16 options, parents and employers.
47. Annex B provides a template for use when preparing and publishing Purpose Statements. It is not mandatory to use the template, but DfE recommends that awarding organisations do so, as it will make it easier for students and their parents to compare qualifications and make informed choices.

B. Size

48. The size of a qualification must relate to its purpose, the level of study and the skills and knowledge that the student will develop.

Requirement

49. Qualifications must meet or exceed the following minimum size requirements to be recognised in the 2017 and 2018 performance tables:

- Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 must be at least 150 Guided Learning Hours (GLH);
- Applied General qualifications must be at least 150 GLH;
- Tech Levels must be at least 300 GLH.

50. These are minimum requirements. We expect the majority of qualifications to be larger than these minimum requirements.

51. Ofqual will shortly be consulting on expectations of awarding organisations for determining a qualification's guided learning hours. In the meantime, the current GLH measure will be used to confirm the size of a qualification.

52. Tech Levels must be at least 300 GLH to provide sufficient time for meaningful skills development that will equip a student to follow a particular trade or profession. Applied General qualifications have a lower minimum size requirement to enable students to take one of these qualifications alongside one or more substantial qualifications within a 16-19 study programme.

53. Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 have a minimum size requirement of 150 GLH to enable a student to complete one of these qualifications in the first year of their 16-19 study programme before progressing to a Tech Level.

Evidence sought

54. Awarding organisations must provide evidence to justify the proposed size of a qualification when submitting it to Ofqual for regulation.

55. DfE will judge this characteristic on the basis of the GLH value held in the Ofqual Register.

C. Recognition

Requirement

56. Vocational qualifications must be publicly recognised by the following users of qualifications:

- **for Tech Levels and Substantial Vocational Qualifications** at level 2 – employers, recognised professional or trade bodies, or national licensed professional registration schemes; and
- **for Applied General qualifications** – higher education institutions (HEIs).

57. Detailed guidance on what constitutes an employer, professional or trade body, national licensed professional registration scheme and higher education institution can be found in Annex C.

58. To demonstrate genuine support for a qualification, letters of support must:

- give the full title, qualification number and awarding organisation for each qualification, as opposed to a generic qualification type or suite of qualifications; and
- confirm the name, job title and organisation of the person providing support.

59. Letters of support must be publicly available on the awarding organisation's website, alongside the Purpose Statement and the qualification specification.

60. Where letters of support are not written in English, translations must be provided.

61. To help awarding organisations meet this requirement, Annex D includes open letters from the Minister for Skills and Enterprise to employers and higher education institutions, asking for their assistance in identifying vocational qualifications that best support a young person's progression into work or further study.

Evidence sought

62. For Tech Levels and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, awarding organisations must provide:

- a minimum of one letter of support from a recognised and relevant UK professional or trade body representing the industry, occupation(s) or occupational group covered by the content of the qualification; and/or
- letters of support from at least five employers that are representative of the occupation or occupational group to which the qualification relates. No more than two letters from sole traders and micro-businesses (employing fewer than ten members of staff) will be accepted as evidence of employer support. If the qualification covers more than one occupation, endorsement is required from employers to cover all occupations; and/or

- a letter indicating that the qualification is accepted by a national licensed professional registration scheme.

63. No more than two letters of support can come from employers that are also approved centres for an awarding organisation.

64. For Applied General qualifications, awarding organisations are required to provide a minimum of three letters of support from higher education institutions (HEIs). These must confirm that the HEI recognises the qualification as fulfilling entry requirements to higher education courses in a range of subjects, either by meeting entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside other qualifications at the same level.

65. Awarding organisations may also provide further letters of support from users (see paragraph 56) beyond the minimum requirement. These will not be used by DfE as evidence when judging this requirement.

Additional characteristics that qualifications must demonstrate to meet the full requirements

66. All level 3 vocational qualifications submitted for approval in 2015 will need to meet the full requirements to be recognised in the school and college performance tables from 2018. Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 submitted for approval in 2015 will be judged against either the interim or full requirements to be recognised in the school and college performance tables from 2018. However, they must meet the full requirements to be recognised in the 2019 performance tables (see paragraph 104).

D. Appropriate content

67. To provide employers and HEIs with greater confidence in the knowledge and skills of a qualification holder, a significant proportion of the content of each qualification must be mandatory.

Requirement

68. A qualification specification must state the specific content that students must pass to achieve the qualification. Mandatory content and the associated contribution to the overall grade must make up at least:

- 40% of a Substantial Vocational Qualification at level 2;
- 40% of a Tech Level;
- 60% of an Applied General qualification.

69. DfE expects the majority of approved vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds to exceed these minimum requirements.

70. Where qualifications have identified more than one pathway and/or combinations in which the content can be studied, the mandatory content requirement should apply equally to these. All students following the same pathway must take the same mandatory content, although the mandatory content may differ between pathways. Awarding organisations will need to ensure that pathways are clear and understandable to students, employers and further and higher education providers.

Evidence sought

71. Awarding organisations must state clearly in the qualification specification which content is mandatory and the contribution that the mandatory content makes to the overall grade.

E. Appropriate assessment

72. To ensure approved vocational qualifications taken by 16-19 year olds have the confidence of industry and further and higher education providers, a significant proportion of the content must be subject to external assessment.

73. External assessment is a form of assessment in which question papers, assignments and tasks are specified by the awarding organisation, then taken under specified conditions (including details of supervision and duration) and marking or assessment judgements are made by the awarding organisation. It does not include moderation or verification of centre-based assessment undertaken by an awarding organisation.

74. External assessment need not be limited to paper or on-screen tests. It may include digital recordings of students, external examiners viewing and assessing artefacts made by students, assessed performance at an external assessment centre, vivas or other effective means made possible by developing technologies.

75. Internal assessment must be subject to appropriate controls by the awarding organisation, through external verification or moderation. External verification is the process by which an awarding organisation checks that the internal assessment processes, decisions and outcomes are valid and accurate. External moderation is the process by which assessment processes, decisions and outcomes are adjusted in order to maintain valid and consistent standards and outcomes. In both cases, awarding organisations may intervene to ensure that centres' assessment decisions are correct.

Requirement

76. The proportion of a qualification's content that is externally assessed, and the associated contribution to the overall grade, should reflect the purpose and content of the qualification and must be at least:

- 25% of a Substantial Vocational Qualification at level 2;
- 30% of a Tech Level qualification;
- 40% of an Applied General qualification.

77. DfE expects the majority of approved vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds to exceed these minimum requirements.

78. To ensure that external assessment provides sufficient challenge, qualification specifications or associated assessment guidance must state that repeat submissions are not allowed. Students failing to reach the required standard or deemed to have underperformed, must be given the option of one retake opportunity. The retake must be a new task or assignment different to the original assessment.

79. All assessments must be suitably controlled to ensure that work submitted is authentic (i.e. prepared and produced by students independently, without assistance from others and free of plagiarism) and assessed against clear and unambiguous criteria setting out how levels of attainment will be differentiated.

Evidence sought

80. The qualification specification must clearly explain the arrangements for both external and internal assessment, including the controls to be used. It must include information about the knowledge, skills and understanding that will be assessed, as well as details of the arrangements for the assessments. It must clearly set out the percentage of the qualification's content that is subject to external assessment. This is particularly important for linear or non-modular qualifications.

F. Synoptic assessment

81. Vocational qualifications must include synoptic content that helps develop a student's appreciation and understanding of the connections between the different elements of a body of knowledge and skills, relating to a subject or occupation/occupational group. Associated synoptic assessment must require the student to identify and use effectively, in an integrated way, an appropriate selection of skills, techniques, concepts, theories and knowledge from across the course content.

82. 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.”

Requirement

83. DfE has 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. Synoptic assessment does not necessarily have to involve external assessment.

Evidence sought

84. Awarding organisations will need to demonstrate in the specification how the qualification meets the agreed definition and includes a significant amount of synoptic content and assessment. This is particularly important for qualifications that do not have an explicit synoptic assessment or where synoptic assessment is deemed to be present in a wide range of assessments. 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.

G. Grading

85. All 16-19 vocational qualifications at levels 2 and 3 recognised in performance tables must be graded. Grading differentiates students' performance, provides motivation and ambition by recognising high achievement and helps to raise industry and HEI confidence in vocational qualifications.

Requirement

86. Qualifications must have a distinction, merit, pass, fail structure or a more detailed grading scale.

87. Grading must apply to the overall qualification and reflect a student's attainment across the qualification's content.

Evidence sought

88. The approach to grading must be available in the qualification specification. It must explain how final grades are derived from assessments, particularly where not all individual units or assessments are graded.

H. Employer involvement (Tech Levels and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 only)

89. Employer involvement in the delivery and/or assessment of technical qualifications provides a clear 'line of sight' to work, enriches learning, raises the credibility of the qualification in the eyes of employers, parents and students and furthers collaboration between the learning and skills sector and industry.

Requirement

90. Qualifications submitted for approval as Tech Levels or Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 must:

- require all students to undertake meaningful activity involving employers during their study; and
- be governed by quality assurance procedures run by the awarding organisation to confirm that education providers have secured employer involvement for every student. Qualification specifications or associated quality assurance documentation must specify the action that will be taken if an education provider has not secured employer involvement.

Evidence sought

91. Qualification specifications must require all students working towards the qualification to undertake meaningful activity involving employers, from the list of eligible activities below. This list has been informed by a call for examples of good practice in employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications⁹.

92. No minimum duration or contribution to the overall qualification grade has been specified for the list of eligible activities, to give providers and employers flexibility in how they work together to support students' learning. However, the contribution that meaningful activities make to the qualification must be significant. Activities and their contribution to the students' learning must be set out in the qualification specification. They must relate to one or more elements of the mandatory content of the qualification as a minimum.

Meaningful employer involvement:

In all cases participating industry practitioners and employers must be relevant to the industry sector or occupation/occupational group to which the qualification relates.

- students undertake structured work-experience or work-placements that develop skills and knowledge relevant to the qualification¹⁰;
- students undertake project(s), exercises(s) and/or assessments/examination(s) set with input from industry practitioner(s);
- students take one or more units delivered or co-delivered by an industry practitioner(s). This could take the form of master classes or guest lectures;
- industry practitioners operate as 'expert witnesses' that contribute to the assessment of a student's work or practice, operating within a specified assessment framework. This may be a specific project(s), exercise(s) or examination(s), or all assessments for a qualification.

93. The following activities, whilst valuable, do not meet the requirement for meaningful employer involvement:

- employers' or industry practitioners' input to the initial design and content of a qualification;
- employers hosting visits, providing premises, facilities or equipment;

⁹ [Employer involvement in the delivery and assessment of vocational qualifications](#)

¹⁰ [DfE work experience guidance](#)

- employers or industry practitioners providing talks or contributing to delivery on employability, general careers advice, CV writing, interview training etc;
- student attendance at career fairs, events or other networking opportunities;
- simulated or provider-based working environments e.g. hairdressing salons, florists, restaurants, travel agents, small manufacturing units, car servicing facilities;
- employers providing students with job references.

Additional evidence requirements (required within the first two years of a qualification being awarded)

94. Qualifications approved against the full requirements need to demonstrate characteristics I and J within the first two years of being awarded to students aged 16-19.

95. All qualifications will be subject to periodic reviews for the progression and track record characteristics.

I. Progression

Requirement

96. Within the first two years of a vocational qualification being awarded to 16-19 year olds, the awarding organisation must provide clear evidence:

- for **Tech Levels** and **Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2** – that students go on to secure related employment, Apprenticeships, places on related training or courses at a higher level.
- for **Applied General qualifications** – that students go on to study at a higher level.

Evidence sought

97. Awarding organisations must provide formal quantitative and qualitative evidence that the qualification enables progression. Evidence could include:

- written statements or published information demonstrating that a qualification is recognised and acceptable for entry to a range of higher level courses or training programmes;
- endorsements from students confirming a qualification has helped them progress to employment, an Apprenticeship or higher level course;
- the results of destination surveys; and
- endorsements from employers and professional or trade bodies.

98. Evidence from schools, further and higher education institutions, training providers, employers, professional or trade bodies or students must clearly show:

- the full title and qualification number of the qualification being referred to;
- the full name, address and job title of the individual supplying the evidence;
- the contact details of the organisation they represent.

99. References from schools, further and higher education institutions or training providers must be from people in a position to provide evidence of progression or give assurance on entry requirements to a range of courses e.g. head of admissions, head of 6th form, etc.

J. Track record

100. Low take-up demonstrates that students and providers do not, in general, see a qualification as a strong route to employment, Apprenticeships or a higher level course/qualification.

101. Awarding organisations may seek exemption from this requirement by providing evidence that the low take-up of a Tech Level or Substantial Vocational Qualification at level 2 is due to it relating to a niche industry sector, technology or process, and that removing the qualification from performance tables would leave a gap in vocational provision and disadvantage economic growth.

Requirement

102. Vocational qualifications need to be achieved by at least 100 students aged 16-19, in at least three centres, in one of the first two years following approval for recognition in performance tables.

Evidence sought

103. All qualifications will be subject to periodic reviews of track record. DfE will use records of completion data for the track record requirement. Awarding organisations may opt to provide completion data for a qualification, but this is not essential as DfE's data will be used to make the final judgement.

Section 3: Process for approval

104. This section provides information on the process for the submission of qualifications for approval as Tech Levels, Applied General Qualifications and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, including:

- entry routes into the 2017 performance tables;
- entry routes into the 2018 performance tables;
- evidence required for all qualifications submitted;
- evidence requirements for qualifications submitted for 2017 performance tables;
- evidence requirements for qualifications submitted for 2018 performance tables;
- key dates and further information.

105. The requirements of 16-19 qualifications submitted for consideration are summarised in the table below.

	Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2	Tech Levels and Applied General Qualifications
2014 submissions for 2017 list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First time judgements made for these qualifications • Qualifications judged against the interim requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications judged against interim or full requirements • Qualifications approved for 2016 tables remain on the list
2015 submissions for 2018 list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications judged against interim or full requirements • Qualifications approved for 2017 tables remain on the list 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications judged against the full requirements only • Qualifications approved against full requirements for 2017 tables remain on the list (subject to review of progression and track record, if required)
2016 submissions for 2019 list	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications judged against the full requirements only • Qualifications approved against full requirements for 2018 tables remain on the list (subject to review of progression and track record, if required) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications judged against the full requirements only • Qualifications approved against full requirements for 2018 tables remain on the list (subject to review of progression and track record, if required)

Table 2: Requirements of Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels and Applied General Qualifications, by year of submission for approval

Entry routes into the 2017 performance tables

106. Qualifications eligible to be included on the 2017 performance tables lists must be available to students starting their post-16 studies in September 2015. They will fall into one of the following categories:

- Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications included on the 2016 performance tables lists that have not been amended. See paragraph 115.
- Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications included on the 2016 performance tables lists that have been redeveloped to meet the full requirements. See paragraph 116.
- regulated level 2 and 3 qualifications not included on the 2016 performance tables lists that are being submitted for judgement against the interim requirements for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications. See paragraph 117.
- regulated level 3 qualifications not included on the 2016 performance tables list that are being submitted for judgement against the full requirements for Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications. Qualifications judged not to demonstrate the full requirements may be approved against the interim requirements. See paragraph 118.

NB Any qualification included on the 2016 performance tables lists that will no longer be available to students starting post-16 studies in September 2015, will not be included in the 2017 performance tables. Awarding organisations must notify DfE of any change to the status of any such qualifications by **12 September 2014**.

107. DfE will consider regulated qualifications if the appropriate forms and additional evidence are submitted by the deadline – **12 September 2014**. Submissions made after this point will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Entry routes into the 2018 performance tables

108. Qualifications eligible to be included on the 2018 performance tables lists must be available to students starting their post-16 studies in September 2016. They will fall into one of the following categories:

- Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications that met the full requirements and were included on the 2017 performance tables lists that have not been amended. See paragraph 119.
- Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications included on the 2017 performance tables lists that have been redeveloped to meet the full requirements. See paragraph 120.
- regulated level 2 qualifications that are not included on the 2017 performance tables lists and are being submitted for judgement and approval against the interim requirements for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2. See paragraph 121.
- regulated level 2 and 3 qualifications that are not included on the 2017 performance tables lists and are being submitted for judgement against the full requirements for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications . See paragraph 122.

NB Any qualification on the 2017 performance tables lists that will no longer be available to students starting post-16 study in September 2016, will not be included in the 2018 performance tables. Awarding organisations will need to notify DfE of any change to the status of any such qualifications.

109. DfE will consider regulated qualifications if the appropriate forms and additional evidence are submitted by the deadline (date to be confirmed). Submissions made after this point will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Evidence requirements for all qualifications submitted for performance tables

110. The evidence required and the process for submission will be determined by the category of the qualification. Awarding organisations must submit the relevant form for each qualification to be considered for inclusion on the performance tables lists. The form must explain where the evidence of each required characteristic can be found.

111. Where an awarding organisation's evidence is in the qualification specification, reference will need to be made to the specific location (i.e. page number and/or numbered section) or other published documentation. New or redeveloped qualifications, must be on Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications by the time they are submitted to DfE for consideration, and all qualifications must have section 96 approval for teaching to 16-18 year olds.

112. Qualifications will need to demonstrate the relevant characteristics described in section 2 in order to be considered for inclusion in the 2017 and/or 2018 school and college performance tables.

113. All qualifications will be subject to periodic reviews of the progression and track record characteristics. Evidence of track record is held by DfE and this will be used to make the final judgement of characteristic J, if relevant.

114. The process for approving qualifications is set out in Annex E.

Evidence requirements for qualifications submitted for 2017 performance tables

115. Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications that met the interim requirements and were included in the 2016 performance tables lists, that have not been amended:

- awarding organisations need to submit the relevant form confirming a request for continued inclusion on the 2017 performance tables lists;
- no evidence is required for characteristics A-J.

116. Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications included on the 2016 performance tables lists that have been redeveloped to meet the full requirements:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form along with evidence that the qualification demonstrates characteristics A and C-G for Applied General qualifications and A and C-H for Tech Levels.

117. Level 2 and 3 qualifications that are not included on the 2016 performance tables lists and are being submitted for judgement against the interim requirements for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form, indicating the GLH of the qualification, with evidence that the qualification demonstrates characteristics A and C.

118. Level 3 qualifications that are not included on the 2016 performance tables lists and are being submitted for judgement against the full requirements for Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form, indicating the GLH of the qualification, along with evidence that the qualification demonstrates characteristics A and C-G for Applied General qualifications and A and C-H for Tech Levels.

Evidence requirements for qualifications submitted for 2018 performance tables

119. Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications included on the 2017 performance tables lists that meet the full requirements and have not been amended:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form confirming a request for continued inclusion in the 2017 performance tables;
- no evidence is required for characteristics A-J.

120. Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels or Applied General qualifications included on the 2017 performance tables lists that have been redeveloped to meet the full requirements:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form with evidence that the qualification demonstrates characteristics A and C-G (for Applied General qualifications) and A and C-H (for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 and Tech Levels).

121. Level 2 qualifications that are not included on the 2017 performance tables lists and are being submitted for judgement against the interim requirements for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form, indicating the GLH of the qualification, with evidence that the qualification demonstrates characteristics A and C.

122. Level 2 and 3 qualifications that are not included on the 2017 performance tables lists and are being submitted for judgement against the full requirements for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2, Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications:

- awarding organisations will need to submit the relevant form, indicating the GLH of the qualification, along with evidence that the qualification demonstrates characteristics A and C-G (for Applied General qualifications) and A and C-H (for Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 and Tech Levels).

Key dates for 2017 performance tables

Stage	2017 processes
Forms and submission details made available to awarding organisations	June 2014
Process opens for awarding organisations to submit qualifications for judgement	June 2014
For qualifications included on the 2016 list that have not been amended, deadline for awarding organisations to submit forms to DfE	25 July 2014
Deadline for new or amended qualifications to be on Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications	12 September 2014
Deadline for all regulated qualifications to be submitted to DfE	12 September 2014
Publication of the lists of qualifications included on the 2017 performance tables	November 2014
Deadline for awarding organisations to request a review of decisions about qualifications not approved	December 2014
Amendments to the list of qualifications following the review process	January 2015

Table 3: Key dates for the 2017 performance tables process

The 2018 process will follow the same pattern as the 2017 process, but may be brought forward so that the submissions deadline falls in the summer of 2015.

Dates will be confirmed in due course.

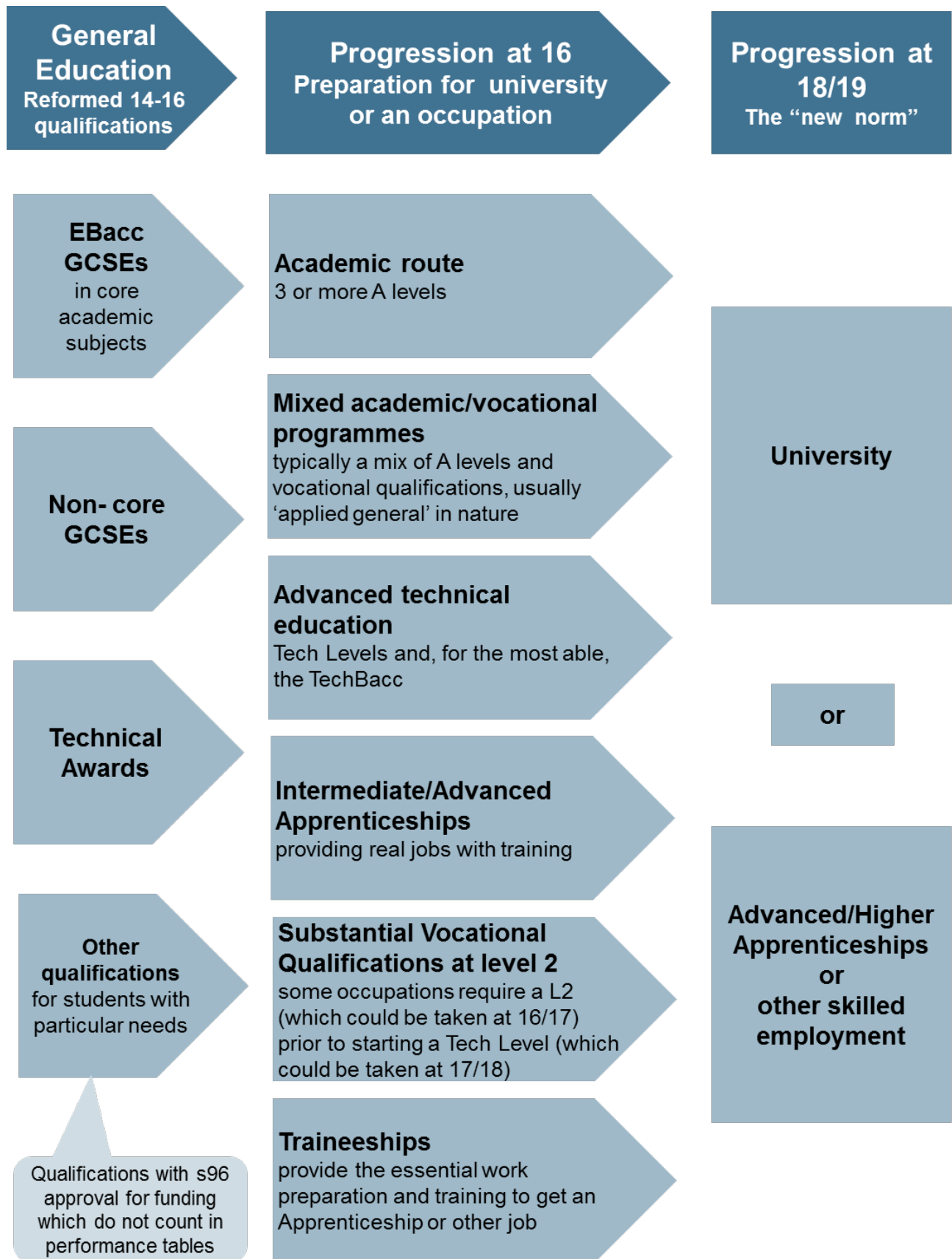
Further information

DfE will make operational details (including forms and submission addresses) available to awarding organisations when the process opens in June 2014 (for 2017 performance tables lists) and spring 2015 (for 2018 performance tables lists).

Awarding organisations will be notified of the outcomes for their qualifications in advance of publication of the performance tables lists.

Awarding organisations will have the opportunity to request reviews of decisions if they disagree with the assessments of the evidence submitted. Evidence will be considered by an independent reviewer who was not involved in the original assessment.

Annex A: 14-19 Academic and Vocational Pathways



Annex B: Purpose statement template

Awarding organisations must provide the information requested below for the declared purpose (characteristic A). This template can be used for Purpose Statements, although it is not mandatory. Awarding organisations can devise their own if they wish to provide the information in a different format. All Purpose Statements must be provided in plain English to ensure the information will be understood by students considering their post-16 options.

Awarding Organisation Name and Logo

Title of Regulated Qualification (including level and qualification number (QN)).

OVERVIEW

- Who is this qualification for?

e.g. It is for someone who wants to work in the xxx industry or envisages a career in xxx occupation(s) or xxx occupational group. Please summarise any prior qualifications/levels of attainment a student needs in order to take this qualification.

- What does this qualification cover?

Please describe in summary terms the key topics/skills/knowledge the student will need to successfully complete to gain the qualification, explaining which are mandatory and which are optional. For Tech Levels and Substantial Vocational Qualifications at level 2 with employer involvement, please explain what this entails.

WHAT COULD THIS QUALIFICATION LEAD TO?

- Will the qualification lead to employment, and if so, in which job role and at what level?

Please give examples of a specific industry, occupation(s) or occupational group that the qualification prepares the learner for or supports the learner in.

- Will the qualification lead to further learning?

Please confirm the subjects/particular qualifications/Apprenticeships students can go on to study at a higher level.

- If there are larger and/or smaller versions of this qualification or it is available at different skills levels, why should a student take this particular one?

Please explain if the qualification is part of a larger suite and what the rationale is for the different sizes and levels of qualification to help the student make an informed decision on which qualification in the suite is right for them.

WHO SUPPORTS THIS QUALIFICATION?

i) Industry

Please indicate which professional or trade bodies and/or individual employers support this qualification, and provide hyperlinks to all letters of support.

If the qualification provides professional registration, please explain and provide a hyperlink to further information.

ii) Further and Higher Education

Please indicate which HEIs or post-16 providers recognise this qualification for entry to a higher level course or qualification. Please provide hyperlinks to all letters of support.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Purpose Statement may indicate that a qualification is intended as a Tech Level, Applied General qualification, or Substantial Vocational Qualification at level 2 but should not suggest that approval has been given until this is confirmed by publication of the 16-19 performance table lists.

Please provide a hyperlink to further information on the qualification.

Annex C: Recognition requirement

Definitions

An **employer** is a business based in the UK employing at least 10 members of staff.

A **professional body** is a UK-based organisation seeking to further a particular occupation, the interests of individuals engaged in that occupation, and the public interest. Typically this is done through the defining and maintenance of standards of education and training for their profession, and in some cases professional registers. They may hold a royal charter, or may not.

A **trade body** is an organisation founded and funded by businesses that operate in a specific industry within the UK. They may also be referred to as 'industry trade groups' or 'trade associations' or 'employer bodies'.

A **licensed professional registration scheme** is one run by a licensed professional institution deemed to have sufficient experience, procedures and resources to undertake the following tasks:

- assess the competence and commitment of candidates for registration;
- monitor the continuing professional development of registrants;
- monitor the conduct of registrants.

Throughout this technical guidance the term '**Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**' refers to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Further Education Colleges (FECs) funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales or the Scottish Funding Council for higher education, research and related activities.

Further guidance

Trade Unions do **not** count as professional or trade bodies as they represent employees rather than employers.

Employers providing endorsements may be from **private, public or not-for profit sectors**.

Where an awarding organisation is an arm of a professional or trade body, recognition of the qualification will be accepted alongside letters of support from employers.

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) have had significant involvement in the development of most existing vocational qualifications and in many cases supported their original accreditation by Ofqual. For this reason **their further endorsement is not required**.

Annex D: DfE statements for use with industry and education providers

To help awarding organisations meet the recognition requirement, Matthew Hancock, Minister for Enterprise and Skills, has written open letters to employers and higher education institutions, asking for their assistance in identifying the vocational qualifications that best support a young person's progression into work or further study.

These letters are included overleaf.



Recognition of high quality technical qualifications for school and college performance tables

An open letter to employers

The government needs your help in identifying which technical qualifications meet industry needs. In return, we will only recognise in school and college performance tables those technical qualifications that have secured industry endorsement. This will incentivise schools and colleges to deliver technical qualifications backed by industry.

To help achieve this, we are asking awarding organisations to supply us with evidence that their qualifications are recognised and supported by employers and/or professional and trade bodies.

So you may be approached by awarding organisations, asking you to confirm that a particular qualification or qualifications meet your skills needs, and to confirm this in writing. We hope you can consider the following when reviewing qualifications:

- Does the qualification cover the required knowledge and skills you expect of a new workforce entrant?
- Would the qualification give a student an advantage when applying for related jobs or Apprenticeship opportunities in your industry or occupation?

To help students and employers compare qualifications, each technical qualification will have a 'purpose statement' explaining who it is designed for, and what it could lead to. You may find it useful to review a qualification's purpose statement when making your decision on whether to support a qualification.

By pledging your support for particular technical qualifications you are helping 16-19 year olds identify the qualifications that will provide the best preparation for entry and progression in their chosen career.

If you do decide to provide a letter of support, this will be published on the awarding organisation's website so that learners can see for themselves which qualifications are recognised by industry as fit for purpose.

Higher education and employer recognition is one of nine requirements that technical qualifications must meet to feature in school and college 16-19 performance tables. Please click on the hyperlink for details of the [full requirement](#).

Your help in identifying the best technical qualifications is greatly appreciated.

Matthew Hancock

Minister for Skills and Enterprise



Department
for Education

Recognition of high quality qualifications for school and college performance tables

An open letter to higher education institutions

The government needs your help in identifying which vocational qualifications best support progression to higher education. In return, we will only recognise these level 3 vocational qualifications in school and college performance tables. This will incentivise schools and colleges to deliver vocational qualifications backed by higher education and/or industry.

To help achieve this, we are asking awarding organisations to supply us with evidence that their qualifications are recognised and supported by higher education institutions.

So you may be approached by awarding organisations, asking you to confirm that a particular qualification or qualifications provide progression opportunities to higher education, and to confirm this in writing.

Specifically, we are asking you to confirm that your institution recognises the qualification as fulfilling entry requirements to higher education courses in a range of subjects, either in their own right or alongside other level 3 qualifications.

To help students and employers compare qualifications, each vocational qualification will have a 'purpose statement' explaining who it is designed for, and what it could lead to. You may find it useful to review a qualification's purpose statement when making your decision on whether to support a qualification.

By pledging your support for particular vocational qualifications you are helping 16-19 year olds identify the qualifications that will provide the best preparation for higher education.

If you do decide to provide a letter of support, this will be published on the awarding organisation's website so that learners can see for themselves which qualifications are recognised by higher education institutions as fit for purpose.

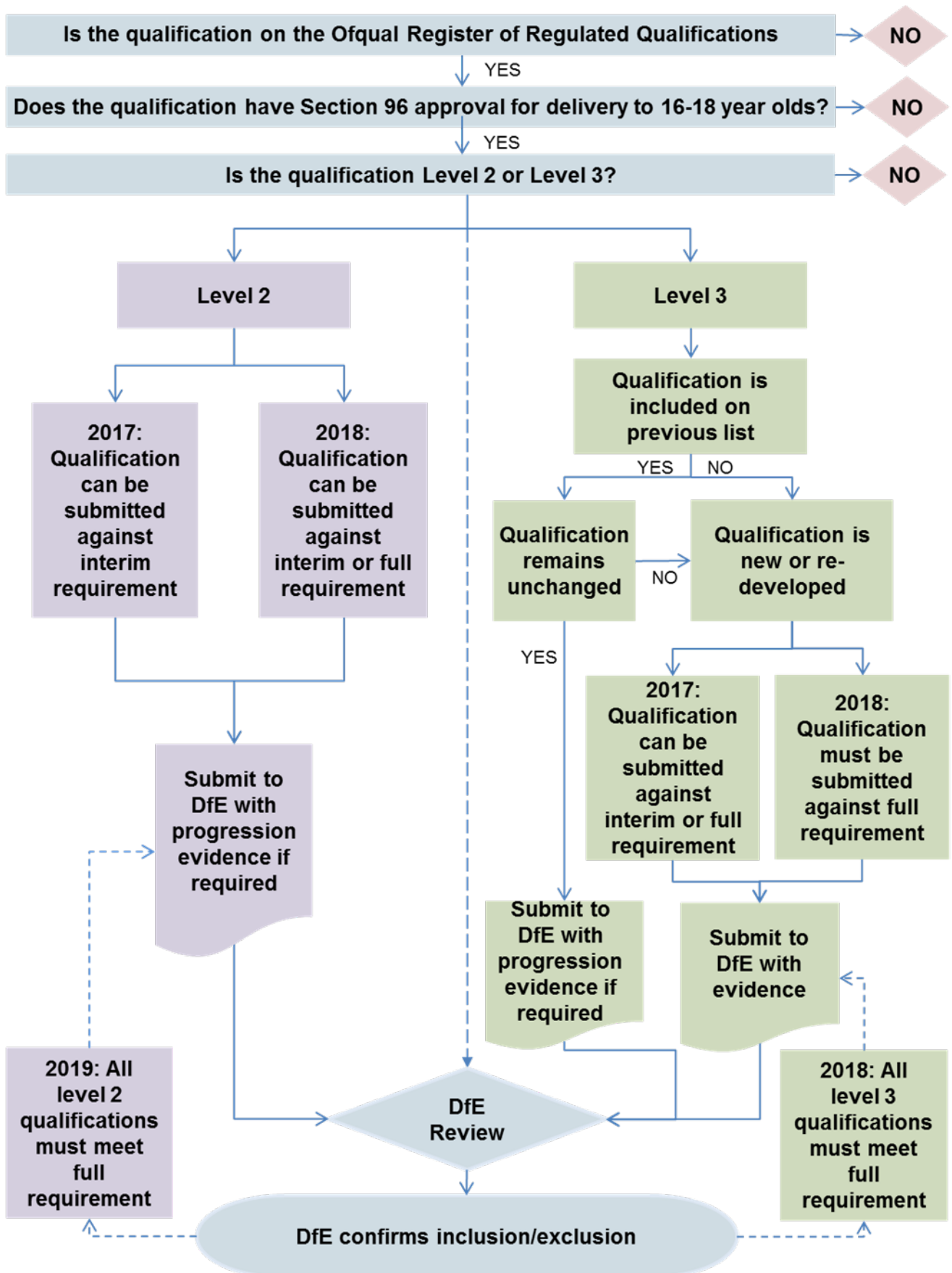
Higher education and employer recognition is one of nine requirements that technical qualifications must meet to feature in performance tables. Please click on the hyperlink for details of the [full requirement](#) .

Your help in identifying the best vocational qualifications is greatly appreciated.

Matthew Hancock

Minister for Skills and Enterprise

Annex E: Process for submission of qualifications for 2017/18 performance tables





Department
for Education

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