



Department  
for Education

# **16 to 19 study programmes**

**Departmental advice, for senior leadership teams, curriculum planners, teachers, trainers and co-ordinators on the planning or delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes**

**March 2015**

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## About this departmental advice

This is departmental advice from the Department for Education (DfE). This advice is non-statutory and has been produced to help recipients understand their obligations and duties in relation to provision of education and training for young people in their institution.

## Expiry or review date

This advice applies to the 2014 to 2015 and 2015 to 2016 academic years. It updates a similar document published in 2014.

## Who is this advice for?

This advice is for everyone involved in the planning or delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes, including senior leadership teams, curriculum planners and coordinators, teachers, trainers. It is also relevant to organisations delivering traineeships for those aged 16 to 24.

This guidance applies to school sixth forms, further education (FE) colleges, sixth form colleges, work-based learning providers and training providers.

## Key points

- All 16 to 19 students should be given the opportunity to take a study programme which reflects their prior attainment, education and career goals.
- Study programmes should include substantial academic or [applied and technical qualifications](#); non-qualification activity including work experience; and the study of [English and maths](#) where students do not hold a GCSE graded A\*-C in that subject by age 16.
- [Funding](#) is now on a per student, not per qualification basis.
- New [accountability measures](#) will be introduced from 2016.

## Background

Professor Alison Wolf, in her [Review of vocational education \(2011\)](#) recommended that study programmes be introduced to offer students breadth and depth, without limiting their options for future study or work. The department consulted on proposals for study programmes and in July 2012 published its [response and plans for implementation](#).

Professor Wolf also recommended that in order to enhance their employability skills, all young people should be able to gain real experience and knowledge of the workplace.

The final [progress report](#) detailing the action taken by the government on each of Professor Wolf's 27 recommendations was published in February 2015.

Early data on the changes in provision following the introduction of study programmes can be found at [here](#) and in Ofsted's Thematic Survey of Study Programmes published in September 2014 '[Transforming 16 to 19 education and training: the early implementation of 16 to 19 study programmes](#)'.

## Study programme principles

All 16 to 19 students should be given the opportunity to follow a study programme that:

- provides progression to a level higher than that of their prior attainment
- includes qualification(s) that are of sufficient size and rigour to stretch the student and that are clearly linked to suitable progression opportunities in training, employment or higher levels of education
- requires students who do not already have GCSE A\*-C in maths and English to work towards them (or other approved [stepping stone](#) qualifications) that will help the student in question to progress towards achievement of these qualifications
- includes work experience - this may relate to the student's study programme, develop employability skills and/or create potential employment options for those who cannot do substantial vocational qualifications
- includes other activities unrelated to qualifications which develop the character, skills, attitudes and confidence that support progression
- students who are not yet ready to study for a substantial qualification can undertake a programme focused on work experience and the development of employability skills

All students aged 16 to 19, whether doing academic or vocational studies or a mix of both, are expected to follow a study programme tailored to their prior attainment by age 16 and future education and career aspirations. These changes reflect the 'progress and progression' criteria set out in the Ofsted [Common inspection framework](#) introduced in September 2012.

How the study programme principles are applied varies widely depending on students' prior attainment, abilities and ambitions. Broad programme characteristics for students taking different qualification routes are set out below. All providers should ensure their curriculum offer enables students to take qualifications and activities that really do prepare them for their next steps in line with the core principle of study programmes of enabling progression to the next level of education or employment.

## Broad programme characteristics

### Students taking A Levels

Students of all abilities are following study programmes and this includes those studying A level courses. A levels count as substantial qualifications. A level students' study programmes should include non-qualification activity such as tutorials, work experience, work to develop personal or study skills, and support in choosing options to ensure progression into employment and higher education (HE) preferences.

### Students taking applied and technical qualifications

Those students for whom applied or technical qualification (either instead of, or, as well as A levels) is the most appropriate route to their career goal will be expected to study at least one substantial qualification. These should be of sufficient size and relevance to provide a route into a trade, profession or other form of employment, or access to an HE course. They may be taken with, or without, other qualifications, including A levels, and should make up the majority of the study programme time. In most cases these qualifications will be at a level above each student's prior achievement. However some larger qualifications offered at level 2 also provide a route into a trade and can provide progression for students holding other level 2 qualifications.

The government has published three lists of approved applied and technical qualifications for 16 to 19 year olds, to be reported in performance tables alongside academic qualifications, as part of decisive action to restore standards and make the vocational education system more closely linked to the world of work. The latest lists of approved qualifications are relevant to courses that will be taught from September 2015 and reported in the 2017 performance tables: [Applied and Technical qualifications for 14 to 19 year olds](#); they include for 16 to 19 students:

**Tech level qualifications** first reported in 2016 – these are rigorous advanced (level 3) technical qualifications, on a par with A levels and recognised by employers. They equip students with specialist knowledge and skills, enabling entry to an apprenticeship, other skilled employment or a technical degree. Backed by employers, they equip young people with the specialist knowledge they need for a job in occupations ranging from engineering to computing, hospitality to accountancy. In some cases they provide a 'licence to practise' or exemption from professional exams. Tech levels are one of three components of the Technical Baccalaureate (Tech Bacc) performance table measure (see below).

**Applied general qualifications** taught from September 2014 and first reported in 2016 – 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 and fulfil entry requirements for a range of HE courses – either

by meeting entry requirements in their own right or being accepted alongside and adding value to other qualifications at the same level.

**Technical certificates** taught from September 2015 and first reported in 2017 – these provide students aged 16 to 19 with a route into a skilled trade or occupation, where employers recognise entry at this level (most construction trades, care work and hairdressing, for example). They will also provide access to tech levels. They are publicly backed by employers, giving students confidence that the qualification they are taking is genuinely valued. Technical certificates support entry to a wide range of trades and practical occupations from plumbing to bricklaying, or horticulture to professional cookery. Like tech levels, they offer students the chance to acquire the skills and expertise needed for the real economy and provide a passport to a good job or an apprenticeship.

Other qualifications may be taught, providing they have section 96 approval for teaching to 16-19 year olds, but they will not be reported in the performance tables.

## The Technical Baccalaureate

The [Technical Baccalaureate measure](#) is a performance table measure which recognises the achievement of 16 to 19 students taking advanced (level 3) technical study programmes that include a tech level qualification, a level 3 core maths qualification and an extended project qualification (designed to extend students' writing, communication, research and self-motivation skills). This will first be reported in 2016.

## Traineeships

[Traineeships](#) are a condensed study programme involving work experience restricted to young people without level 3 qualifications to help prepare them for an apprenticeship or other sustainable employment. They last a maximum of six months though may be shorter.

The core content of traineeships is work preparation training, English and maths, and a high quality work experience placement. Providers and employers have the freedom to bring these elements together in the best way to engage and support individual trainees and to integrate other support and training, such as mentoring, careers guidance, vocational qualifications and job search support.

The [Traineeships framework for delivery](#) sets out how traineeships should be delivered for academic year 2015 to 2016.

## Large programme uplift

Some large A level, International Baccalaureate and TechBacc programmes will be eligible for a funding uplift in academic year 2016 to 2017 and beyond. Further information can be found [here](#).

## Students with learning difficulties and disabilities

The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) can vary widely, but the study programme principles still apply. Students should follow a programme that prepares them for adulthood, including supporting their progression into work or further study. For students with LDD who have a learning difficulty assessment (LDA) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan, a study programme can apply up to the age of 25. Institutions, in discussion with the student, need to assess what type of programme is most suitable given their career aspirations.

Study programmes for students with profound and/or complex learning difficulties and disabilities may also concentrate on work experience or other non-qualification activities rather than qualifications, to prepare them for adult life. For example, [supported internships](#) are for young people with a special educational needs (SEN) statement, LDA or EHC plan, and aim to prepare young people for employment through extended work placements with employers.

Study programmes should always include English and maths but at an appropriate level. Some students with LDD will be able to work towards achieving GCSE grade C or above whereas others may qualify for exemption from the Education and Funding Agency (EFA) condition of funding. More information about this exemption can be found in the [EFA condition of funding guidance](#).

# Delivering study programmes

## GCSE maths and English

All students aged 16 to 18 do not hold a GCSE an A\*-C or equivalent qualification in both maths and/or in English are need to be studying these subjects as part of their study programme in each academic year.

From August 2014 this requirement became a '[condition of funding](#)'. This means that all students; starting a new study programme from 1 August 2014 of 150 hours or more, who do not hold a GCSE grade A\*-C in maths and/or in English, are required to be studying these subjects as part of their study programme in each academic year. Where appropriate, students can study [other English and maths qualifications](#) such as Functional Skills and Free Standing Maths qualifications recognised by the funding condition as 'interim' or 'stepping stone' qualifications on the journey towards achievement of a GCSE.

From August 2015, the condition of funding will be revised, so all full-time students starting their study programme who have a grade D GCSE in maths and/or English must be enrolled on a GCSE, rather than an approved 'stepping stone' qualification. This revised condition does not apply to students on apprenticeships or traineeships.

In July 2014, the government published its [FE Workforce Strategy](#) which focuses on improving the quantity, quality and professionalism of teachers and trainers in the FE sector, especially in maths and English. The government is funding a number of workforce recruitment and development initiatives to support 16 to 19 providers to improve the quality of English and maths teaching.

## Core maths

In most other advanced economies, the study of maths is the norm for students within their 16 to 18 education. Students who have already achieved GCSE A\*-C should be encouraged to study maths at level 3 in the light of the value placed on this by employers and HE institutions.

Awarding organisations have introduced new 'core maths' qualifications at level 3 which will build on GCSE study. The focus of these is on problem solving, reasoning and the practical application of mathematics and statistics. These new qualifications have been designed with the support and help of employers and universities and suit students with a range of pass grades at GCSE maths, the vast majority of whom currently drop the subject afterwards.

## Work experience

Most students benefit from work experience – a period of time spent with an external, employer that is both stretching and related to their prior attainment and career aspirations. Work Experience is a major factor in developing employability skills alongside GCSE qualifications in English and maths. A work placement should be an integral part of most students study programme and in particular for students choosing to enter a particular occupation or profession or those taking a vocational route to achieve their career aims

It should be based on a student's prior attainment, career and learning goals and can be linked to future aspirations for students taking academic or vocational programmes, in the latter case work experience may contribute to the achievement of tech level qualifications. Extended work experience within a traineeship or supported internship can provide more general preparation for entry into employment or an Apprenticeship

Providers have the responsibility to ensure that the work placement offers challenge and purpose, is set on pre-determined outcomes, and the duration and level of provider/employer support is tailored to the individual needs of the student. The funding change to funding per student means that work experience is now funded at the same level as qualifications. Students who are not taking substantial vocational or academic qualifications should be spending the 'majority' of their time on extended work experience and English and maths.

Whilst we recognise that training in a simulated work environment can help the learner develop new skills and support progression into an external working environment. It is work experience with an external employer and in an external work environment that is recognised by employers and has the greatest impact on students' employability. We expect providers to ensure that wherever possible all young people spend time in an external workplace.

The [departmental advice on work experience](#) brings together the advice from DfE, EFA, Ofsted and the Health and Safety Executive to help providers deliver high quality work experience.

## Other activities within a study programme

Students should also be encouraged to take part in meaningful non-qualification activity alongside work experience placements. This activity may include other planned and organised enrichment activity to build character, including details of the [DfE character awards](#), tutorials, work to develop study skills, leadership, team-work or self-management skills and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award or volunteering.

## Funding

Changes to the funding of 16 to 19 education were introduced to support the introduction of study programmes in August 2012. Funding is now allocated on a per student, not a per qualification basis, making it easier for providers to fund other activities such as work experience. The funding changes also mean that funding is no longer linked to success rates. Students can be entered for more challenging qualifications without fear that failure will affect success and in turn funding. They can now take fewer qualifications that are substantial and spend time on work experience if this is appropriate.

For more information on funding, visit the [16 to 19 funding page](#) on gov.uk.

## Accountability

To support the changes, schools and other providers will be [accountable](#) for the quality of the study programmes that they offer their students through reformed 16 to 19 performance tables. These changes will apply to courses which begin in September 2014. From 2016 onwards school and college performance tables will provide clear and easily understood measures of student achievement. All 16 to 19 providers will also be expected to meet robust minimum standards, with financial penalties, intervention and ultimately closure, for those failing to meet them. Further guidance on accountability can be found on [gov.uk](#).



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