



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**

**August 2014**

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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 area.

## Expiry or review date

This advice applies to the 2014-15 academic year. It updates a similar document published in 2012.

## 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, teachers, trainers and coordinators. It is also relevant to organisations delivering traineeships for those aged 16 to 23.

This guidance applies to FE colleges, sixth form colleges, school sixth forms, 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 vocational qualifications; work experience; and continuation of English and maths where they do not hold a GCSE graded A\*-C in that subject.
- Funding is now on a per student, not per qualification basis.
- New [accountability measures](#) have been introduced.

## 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.

## 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 qualifications that will act as a stepping stone for achievement of these qualifications in time)
- allows for meaningful work experience related to any vocational areas of the study programme, which develops employability skills and/or creates potential employment options for those who cannot do substantial vocational qualifications
- includes other activities unrelated to qualifications that develop the skills, attitudes and confidence that support progression

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 [Common inspection framework](#) introduced in September 2012.

How the study programme principles are applied varies widely depending on students' needs, 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 subjects and activities that really do support their educational and career ambitions. A core principle of study programmes is that they support and encourage 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 vocational qualifications

Those students for whom a vocational qualification is the most appropriate route to their career goal will be expected to study at least one substantial vocational 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 latest list of applicable qualifications was published in July 2014: [Vocational qualifications for 14-19 year olds](#). They include:

Tech level qualifications – these are level 3 vocational qualifications for students wishing to specialise in a specific technical occupation or occupational group. They will equip a student with specialist knowledge and skills, enabling entry to that occupation, or progression to higher education in that occupational area. In some cases they can provide a 'licence to practise' or exemption from professional exams.

Applied general qualifications – these are level 3 (advanced) qualifications that provide broad study in a vocational area. Each of these is recognised by at least three HE institutions as fulfilling entry requirements to a range of HE courses, either in their own right or alongside other level 3 qualifications.

Details of larger qualifications offered at level 2 which provide a route into a trade or other occupation will be published in the autumn of 2014.

### The Technical Baccalaureate

The new [Technical Baccalaureate measure](#) records the achievement of 16 to 19 students taking advanced (level 3) technical study programmes including at least 1 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).

## Traineeships

[Traineeships](#) are a discrete and condensed strand of the study programme. Traineeships are available for motivated 16 to 19 year olds with low qualification levels and are focused on giving them the skills and vital experience they need to compete successfully for apprenticeships and jobs. Employers are at the very centre of traineeships, running the programme or offering high quality work placements in partnership with a trusted provider.

The core content of traineeships is work preparation training, English and maths, and a high quality work 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. Traineeships last a maximum of six months.

The [Traineeships framework for delivery](#) sets out how traineeships should be delivered.

## 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 funding requirement to take one of the qualifications recognised by the funding condition in the list given in the [Education and Funding agency \(EFA\) conditions of funding guidance](#).

# Delivering study programmes

## GCSE maths and English

All students who have not achieved at least a C grade in both **GCSE maths and English** by the end of key stage 4 will have to continue to study those subjects whilst in post 16 education or training. From August 2014 this requirement is a [condition of funding](#). Where GCSE A\*-C English and maths is not immediately attainable, students can study [other English and maths qualifications](#) such as Functional Skills and Free Standing Maths qualifications as 'interim' or 'stepping stone' qualifications on the journey towards achievement of a GCSE. From September 2015 students who enrol with a GCSE grade D will not be permitted to study stepping stone qualifications. A wide range of strategies and incentives have been put in place to help schools, colleges and providers [develop their workforce](#) to meet these conditions.

## Core maths

As in most other advanced economies we want the study of maths to be the norm for students within their 16 to 18 education. Whilst not a requirement, colleges are being encouraged to provide opportunities for students who have already achieved at level 2 at GCSE A\*-C to continue with the study of maths at level 3 in the light of the value placed on this by employers and HE institutions.

Awarding organisations will be introducing new 'core maths' qualifications from September 2015 which will build on GCSE study. Its focus is on problem solving and the practical application of maths skills will help this new qualification to be valued by employers and universities. Core maths qualifications will suit students who achieve a B or C in GCSE maths, the vast majority of whom currently drop the subject afterwards.

## Work experience

Most students can 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 aspiration. Work experience is considered to be a major factor in developing employability skills alongside GCSE qualifications in English and maths. A quality 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.

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 young person. 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 'a majority' of their time on extended work experience, English and maths.

Whilst the opportunity to develop new skills in school and college facilities can be of real value 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.

In October 2013, we published [Departmental advice on work experience](#) that brings together the advice from DfE, EFA, Ofsted and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to help providers deliver high quality work experience. In addition, HSE published new guidance on health and safety requirements for those offering or delivering work experience placements. Visit the HSE website for the [HSE guidance](#).

## 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 activity such as tutorials, work to develop study, 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 at the same time as study programmes. Funding is on a per student, not a per qualification basis, making it easier for providers to fund non-qualification activity 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, and instead take fewer qualifications 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.

Education Funding Agency guidance published in [June 2013](#) states that colleges will receive at least 600 hours funding a year for each student as long as they study for at least 540 hours. Where students' hours are less than 540, part-time funding bands will be used.

## 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.



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